FEBRUARY 1970

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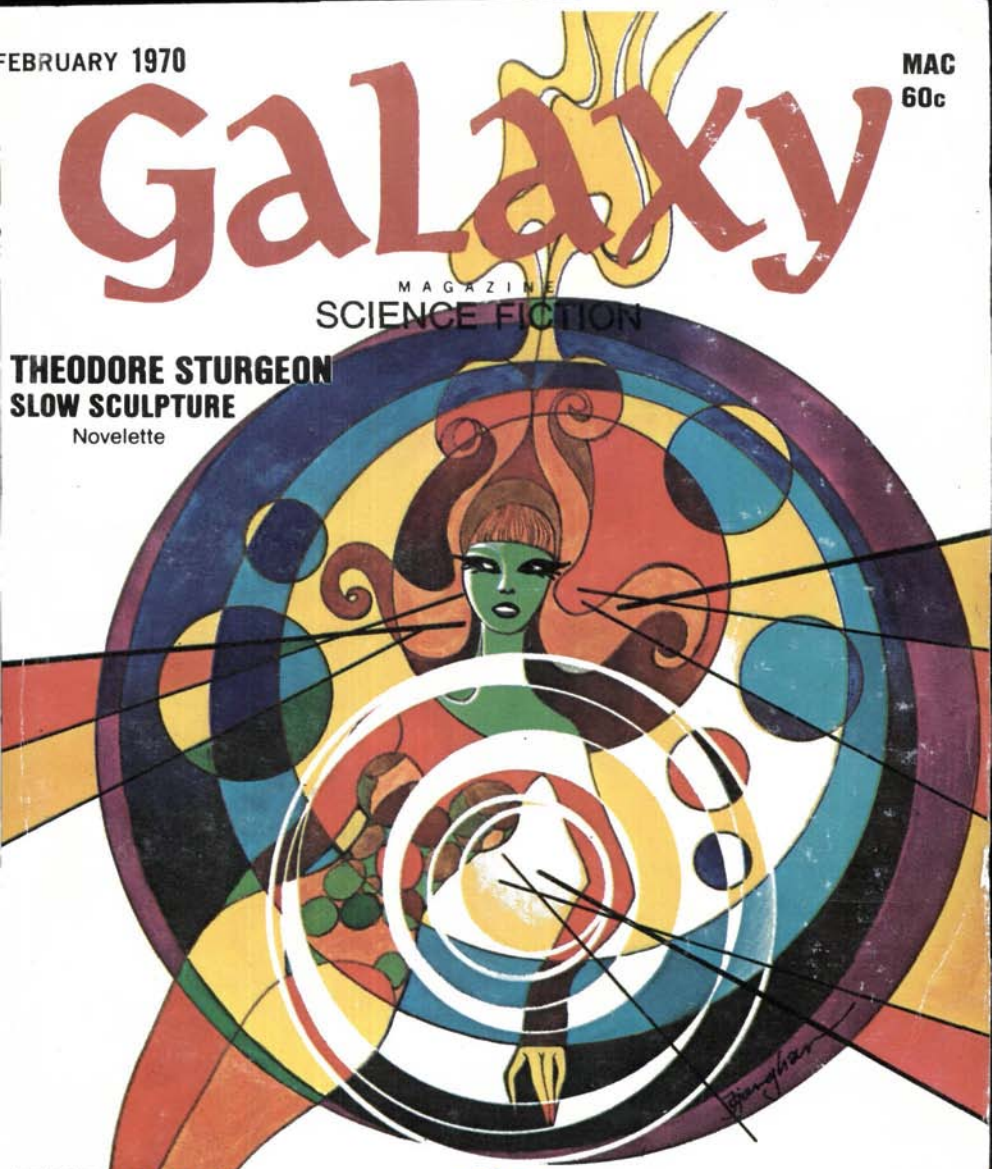
GALAXY

MAGAZINE OF SCIENCE FICTION

THEODORE STURGEON
SLOW SCULPTURE
Novelette



THE SHAKER REVIVAL
Gerald Jonas

Starting in this issue
SUNPOT

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Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION

MAGAZINE

ALL STORIES NEW

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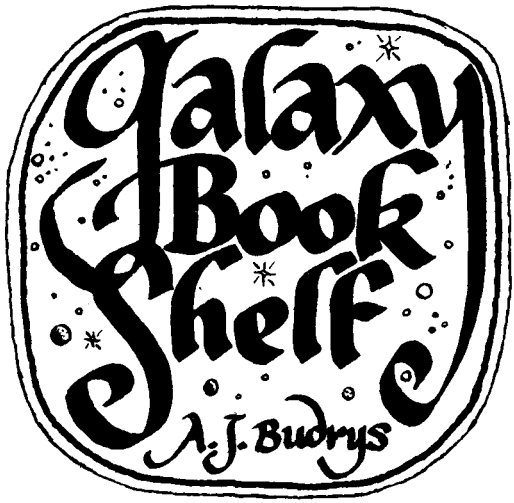

To Live Again
Robert Silverberg

Masque World
Alexei Panshin

The Palace of Eternity
Bob Shaw

The Left Hand of Darkness
Ursula K. LeGuin

●

TO LIVE AGAIN, by Robert Silverberg (Doubleday, $4.95), is a novel about power and about the urge to power which probably is based on the common human craving for immortality. The people in this book, set in an indefinite but apparently twenty-first-century United States, have both financial resources based on superb business ability and a process for recording and transplanting personalities.

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(Please turn to page 142)

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THE SHAKER REVIVAL

In this final decade of the twentieth century sainthood is only for the very young!

GERALD JONAS

TO: Arthur Stock, Executive Editor, *Ideas Illustrated*, New York City, 14632008447
FROM: Raymond Senter, c/o Hudson Junction Rotel, Hudson Junction, N.Y. 28997601910
ENCLOSED: Tentative Lead for "The Shaker Revival." Pix, tapes upcoming.

JERUSALEM WEST, N.Y., Thursday, June 28, 1995—The work of Salvation goes forward in this green and pleasant Hudson Valley hamlet to the high-pitched accompaniment of turbo-car exhausts and the amplified beat of the "world's loudest jag-rock band." Where worm-eaten apples fell untended in abandoned orchards less than a decade ago a new religious sect has burst into full bloom. In their fantastic four-year history the so-called New Shakers—or United Society of Believers (Revived), to give them their official title—have provoked the hottest controversy in Christendom since Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five thesis to the door of All Saints Church in Wittenberg, Germany, on October Thirty-one, Fifteen-seventeen. Boasting a membership of more than a hundred thousand today, the New Shakers have been processing applications at the rate of nine hundred a week. Although a handful of these "recruits" are in

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their early and middle twenties—and last month a New Jersey man was accepted into the Shaker Family at Wildwood at the ripe old age of thirty-two—the average New Shaker has not yet reached his eighteenth birthday.

Richard F, one of the members of the "First Octave" who have been honored with "uncontaminated" Shaker surnames, explains it this way: "We've got nothing against feebies. They have a piece of the Gift inside just like anyone else. But it's hard for them to travel with the Family. Jag-rock hurts their ears, and they can't sync with the Four Noes, no matter how hard they try. So we say to them, 'Forget it, star. Your wheels are not our wheels. But we're all going somewhere, right? See you at the other end.' "

It is hardly surprising that so many "feebies"—people over thirty—have trouble with the basic Believers' Creed: "No hate, No war, No money, No sex." Evidently, in this final decade of the twentieth century, sainthood is only possible for the very young.

The "Roundhouse" at Jerusalem West is, in one sense, the Vatican of the nationwide movement. But in many ways it is typical of the New Shaker communities springing up from La Jolla, California, to Seal Harbor, Maine. At last count there were sixty-one separate "tribes," some containing as many as fifteen "families" of a hundred and twenty-eight members each. Each Shaker family is housed in an army-surplus pliodesic dome—covering some ten thousand square feet of bare but vinyl-hardened earth—which serves as bedroom, living room, workshop and holy tabernacle, all in one. There is a much smaller satellite dome forty feet from the main building which might be called the Outhouse, but isn't—the New Shakers themselves refer to it as Sin City. In keeping with their general attitude toward the bodily functions, Sin City is the only place in the Jerusalem West compound that is off-limits to visitors.

As difficult as it may be for most North Americans to accept, today's typical Shaker recruit comes from a background of unquestioned abundance and respectability. There is no taint of the Ghetto and no evidence of serious behavioral problems. In fact, Preliminary School records show that these young people often excelled in polymorphous play and responded quite normally to the usual spectrum of chemical and electrical euphorics. As underteens, their proficiency in programed dating was consistently rated "superior" and they were often cited as leaders in organizing multiple-outlet experiences. Later, in Modular School, they scored in the fiftieth percentile or

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better on Brand-Differentiation tests. In short, according to all the available figures, they would have had no trouble gaining admission to the college of their choice or obtaining a commission in the Consumer Corps or qualifying for a Federal Travel Grant. Yet for some reason, on the very brink of maturity, they turned their backs on all the benefits their parents and grandparents fought so hard for in the Cultural Revolution—and plunged instead into a life of regimented sense-denial.

On a typical summer's afternoon at Jerusalem West, with the sun filtering through the translucent dome and bathing the entire area in a soft golden glow, the Roundhouse resembles nothing so much as a giant, queenless beehive. In the gleaming chrome-and-copper kitchen blenders whirr and huge pots bubble as a squad of white-smocked Food Deacons prepares the copious vegetable stew that forms the staple of the Shaker diet. In the sound-proofed garage sector the Shop Deacons are busily transforming another hopeless-looking junkheap into the economical, turbine-powered "hotrod"—one already known to connoisseurs in this country and abroad as the Shakerbike—and the eight Administrative Deacons and their assistants are directing family business from a small fiber-walled cubicle known simply as The Office. And the sixteen-piece band is cutting a new liturgical tape for the Evening Service—a tape that may possibly end up as number one on the federal pop charts like the recent Shaker hit, *This Freeway's Plenty Wide Enough*. No matter where one turns beneath the big dome one finds young people humming, tapping their feet, breaking into snatches of song and generally living up to the New Shaker motto: "Work is Play." One of their most popular songs—a characteristic coupling of Old Shaker words to a modern jag-rock background—concludes with this no-nonsense summation of the Shaker life-style:

It's the Gift to be simple,
The Gift to be free,
The Gift to come down
Where the Gift ought to be.

MORE TO COME

XEROGRAM: June 28 (11:15 P.M.)
TO: The Dean, Skinner Free Institute, Ronkonoma, New Jersey 72441333965
FROM: Raymond Senter, c/o Hudson Junction Rotel, Hudson Junction, N.Y. 28997601910

Friend:

My son Bruce Senter, age 14, was enrolled in your in-

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stitute for a six-week seminar in Applied Physiology beginning May 10. According to the transcript received by his Modular School (NYC118A), he successfully completed his course of studies on June 21. Mrs. Senter and I have had no word from him since. He had earlier talked with his Advisor about pursuing a Field-research project in Intensive Orgasm. I would appreciate any further information you can give me as to his post-seminar whereabouts. Thank you.

TO: Stock, Ex-Ed, *I.I.*
FROM: Senter
ENCLOSED: Background tape. Interview with Harry G (born "Guardino"), member of First Octave. Edited Transcript, June 29.

Q: Suppose we begin by talking a little about your position here as one of the—well, what shall I say? Founding Fathers of the Shaker Revival?

A: First you better take a deep breath, star. That's all out of sync. There's no Founding Fathers here. Or Founding Mothers or any of that jag. There's only one Father and one Mother and they're everywhere and nowhere, understand?

Q: What I meant was—as a member of the First Octave you have certain duties and responsibilities—

A: Like I said, star, everyone's equal here.

Q: I was under the impression that your rules stress obedience to a hierarchy?

A: Oh, there has to be order, sure, but it's nothing personal. If you can punch a computer—you sync with The Office Deacons. If you make it with wheels—you're in the Shop crew. Me—I fold my bed in the morning, push a juice-horn in the band and talk to reporters when they ask for me. That doesn't make me Pope.

Q: What about the honorary nomenclature?

A: What's that?

Q: The initials. Instead of last names.

A: Oh, yeah. They were given to us as a sign. You want to know what of?

Q: Please.

A: As a sign that no one's stuck with his birth kit. Sure, you may start with a Chevvie Six chassis and I have to go with a Toyota. That's the luck of the DNA. But we all need a spark in the chamber to get it moving. That's the Gift. And if I burn clean and keep in tune I may leave you flat in my tracks. Right?

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Q: What about the Ghetto?

A: Even the Blacks have a piece of the Gift. What they do with it is their trip.

Q: There's been a lot of controversy lately about whether your movement is really Christian—in a religious sense. Would you care to comment on that?

A: You mean like "Jesus Christ, the Son of God?" Sure, we believe that. And we believe in Harry G, the Son of God and Richard F the Son of God and —what's your name, star?— Raymond Senter, the Son of God. That's the gift. That's what it's all about. Jesus found the Gift inside. So did Buddha, Mother Ann, even Malcolm X —we don't worry too much about who said what first. First you find the Gift—then you live it. The Freeway's plenty wide enough.

Q: Then why all the emphasis on your Believers' Creed, and the Articles of Faith, and your clothes?

A: Look, star, every machine's got a set of specs. You travel with us, you learn our set. We keep the chrome shiny, the chambers clean. And we don't like accidents.

Q: Your prohibitions against money and sex—

A: "Prohibitions" is a feebie word. We're free from money and sex. The Four Noes are like a Declaration of Independence. See, everybody's really born free—but you have to know it. So we don't rob cradles. We say, let them grow up, learn what it's all about—the pill, the puffer, the feel-o-mat—all the perms and combos. Then, when they're fifteen or sixteen, if they still crave those chains, okay. If not, they know where to find us.

Q: What about the people who sign up and then change their minds?

A: We have no chains—if that's what you mean.

Q: You don't do anything to try to keep them?

A: Once you've really found the Gift inside there's no such thing as "changing your mind."

Q: What's your attitude toward the Old Shakers? They died

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out, didn't they, for lack of recruits?

A: Everything is born and dies and gets reborn again.

Q: Harry, what would happen if this time the whole world became Shakers?

A: Don't worry, star. You won't be around to see it.

MORE TO COME

XEROGRAM: June 29 (10:43 P.M.)

TO: Connie Fine, Director, Camp Encounter, Wentworth, Maine, 47119650023

FROM: Raymond Senter, Hudson Junction Rotel, Hudson Junction, N.Y., 28997601910

Connie:

Has Bruce arrived yet? Arlene and I have lost contact with him in the last week, and it occurred to me that he may have biked up to camp early and simply forgotten to buzz us—he was so charged up about being a full counselor-leader of his own T-group this season. Anyway, would you please buzz me soonest at the above zip? You know how mothers tend to overload the worry-circuits until they know for sure that their little wriggler is safely plugged in somewhere. Joy to you and yours, Ray.

TO: Stock, Ex-Ed., *I.I.*

FROM: Senter

ENCLOSED: Fact sheet on Old Shakers

**Foundress*—Mother Ann Lee, b. Feb. 29, 1736, Manchester, England.

**Antecedents*—Early Puritan "seekers" (Quakers), French "Prophets" (Camisards).

**Origin*—Following an unhappy marriage—four children, all dead in infancy—Mother Ann begins to preach that "concupiscence" is the root of all evil. Persecutions and imprisonment.

**1774*—Mother Ann and seven early disciples sail to America aboard the ship *Mariah*. Group settles near Albany. Public preaching against concupiscence. More persecutions. More converts. Ecstatic, convulsive worship. Mother Ann's "miracles."

**1784*—Mother Ann dies.

**1787*—Mother Ann's successors, Father Joseph and Mother Lucy, organize followers into monastic communities and "separate" themselves from sinful world.

**1787-1794*—Expansion of sect through New York State and New England.

**1806-1826*—Expansion of sect across Western frontier—Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana.

**1837-1845*—Mass outbreak of

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spiritualism. Blessings, songs, spirit-drawings and business advice transmitted by deceased leaders through living "instruments."

**1850's*—Highpoint of Society. Six thousand members, 18 communities, fifty-eight "Families."

*Total recorded membership—from late 18th century to late 20th century—approximately seventeen thousand.

*Old Shakers noted for—mail-order seed business, handicrafts (brooms, baskets and boxes), furniture-manufacture.

*Credited with invention of—common clothes pin, cut nails, circular saw, turbine water-wheel, steam-driven washing machine.

**Worship*—Emphasis on communal singing and dancing. Early "convulsive" phase gives way in nineteenth century to highly organized performances and processions—ring dances, square order shuffles.

**Beliefs*—Celibacy, Duality of Deity (Father and Mother God), Equality of the Sexes, Equality in Labor, Equality in Property. Society to be perpetuated by "admission of serious-minded persons and adoption of children."

**Motto*—"Hands to work and Hearts to God."

MORE TO COME

XEROGRAM: June 30 (8:15 A.M.)

TO: Mrs. Rosemary Collins, 133 Escorial Drive, Baywater, Florida, 92635776901

FROM: Raymond Senter, Hudson Junction Rotel, Hudson Junction, N.Y. 28997601910

Dear Rosie:

Has that little wriggler of ours been down your way lately? Bruce is off again on an unannounced sidetrip, and it struck me that he might have hopped down south to visit his favorite aunt. Not to mention his favorite cousin! How is that suntanned teaser of yours? Still taking after you in the S-L-N department? Give her a big kiss for me—you know where! And if Bruce does show up please buzz me right away at the above zip. Much Brotherly Love, Ray.

TO: Stock, Ex-Ed., *I.I.*

FROM: Senter

ENCLOSED: Caption tape for film segment on Worship Service.

JERUSALEM WEST, Saturday, June 30—I'm standing at the entrance to the inner sanctum of the huge Roundhouse here, the so-called Meeting Center, which

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is used only for important ceremonial functions—like the Saturday Night Dance scheduled to begin in exactly five minutes. In the Holy Corridor to my right the entire congregation has already assembled in two rows, one for boys and one for girls, side by side but not touching. During the week the Meeting Center is separated from the work and living areas by curved translucent partitions which fit together to make a little dome-within-a-dome. But when the sun begins to set on Saturday night the partitions are removed to reveal a circular dance floor, which is in fact the hub of the building. From this slightly raised platform of gleaming fibercast, I can look down each radial corridor—past the rows of neatly folded beds in the dormitories, past the shrouded machines in the repair shops, past the partly finished shakerbikes in the garage, past the scrubbed formica tables in the kitchen—to the dim horizon line where the dome comes to rest on the sacred soil of Jerusalem West.

All artificial lights have been extinguished for the Sabbath celebration. The only illumination comes from the last rays of the sun, a dying torch that seems to have set the dome material itself ablaze. It's a little like standing inside the fiery furnace of Nebuchadnezzar with a hundred and twenty-eight unworried prophets of the Lord. The silence is virtually complete—not a cough, not the faintest rustle of fabric is heard. Even the air vents have been turned off—at least for the moment. I become aware of the harsh sound of my own respiration.

At precisely eight o'clock the two lines of worshippers begin to move forward out of the Holy Corridor. They circle the dance floor, the boys moving to the right, the girls to the left. Actually, it's difficult to tell them apart. The Shakers use no body ornaments at all—no paints, no wigs, *no gems, no bugs, no dildoes, no* flashers. All wear their hair cropped short, as if sheared with the aid of an overturned bowl. And all are dressed in some variation of Shaker gear—a loosely fitting, long-sleeved, buttonless and collarless shirt slit open at the neck for two inches and hanging free at the waist over a pair of baggy trousers pulled tight around each ankle by a hidden elastic band.

The garments look vaguely North African. They are made of soft dynaleen and they come in a variety of pastel shades. One girl may be wearing a pale pink top and a light blue bottom. The boy standing opposite her may have on the same colors, reversed. Others in the procession have chosen combinations of lilac and peach, ivory and lemon or turquoise and butternut. The range

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of hues seems endless but the intensity never varies, so that the entire spectacle presents a living demonstration of one of the basic Articles of Faith of the Shaker Revival—Diversity in Uniformity.

Now the procession has ended. The worshipers have formed two matching arcs, sixty-four boys on one side, sixty-four girls on the other, each standing precisely an arm's length from each neighbor. All are barefoot. All are wearing the same expression—a smile so modest as to be virtually undetectable if it were not mirrored and remirrored a hundred and twenty-eight times around the circumference of the ritual circle. The color of the dome has begun to change to a darker, angrier crimson. Whether the natural twilight's being artifically augmented —either from inside or outside the building—is impossible to tell. All eyes are turned upward to a focus about twenty-five feet above the center of the floor, where an eight-sided loudspeaker hangs by a chrome-plated cable from the midpoint of the dome. The air begins to fill with a pervasive vibration like the rumble of a distant monocar racing toward you in the night. And then the music explodes into the supercharged air. Instantly the floor is alive with jerking, writhing bodies —it's as if each chord were an electrical impulse applied directly to the nerve ends of the dancers

Ballantine Books

IF IT'S January, Spring can't be far away. And a Happy New Year to everyone. This month is actually the end of the Fall season for publishers. [Officially, Spring starts for us in February and ends in July.] The end of our present season sees a romp by Fletcher Pratt and L. Sprague de Camp on our list—LAND OF UNREASON—a perfectly delightful adventure of what happens to a young man who is hauled off by a bunch of drunken elves. There is Lin Carter's usual perspicacious introduction.

•

AND JANUARY is also lit by T.L. Sherred's ALIEN ISLAND, in which the secret services get rapped while Regan merchants do the equivalent of buying Manhattan. Well, roughly. And a new one for us—Douglas R. Mason, in a chilling forecast of a Mother-Computer-Complex titled MATRIX. The awful thing is it could happen . . .

•

WE ARE ALSO celebrating January with a reissue of Ted Sturgeon's best, E PLURIBUS UNICORN, MORE THAN HUMAN and CAVIAR, and by bringing the earlier Gorean volumes series by John Norman to the fans who missed them—namely, TARNSMAN OF GOR, OUTLAW OF GOR, PRIEST-KINGS OF GOR.

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Trends for 1970—prices are going up, even ours. But we'll try to hold the 75¢ price for reissues. Given our own personal preference, we'd rather pay 20¢ extra for a good-sized typeface than winkle our way through tiny type. But then, we read all day long, of necessity [and usually half the night, too.] Nevertheless 95¢ is still one helluva bargain for a couple of hours of interesting entertainment.

•

AND in 1970—more fantasy. Ever since we were requested to "Find a second classic *trilogy*," **and did** [Peake's GORMENGHAST] in the *Fall of 1968*, we, assisted by Jim Blish's enthusiasm for Cabell and Lin Carter's for fantasy in general, have been quietly nudging to do more than just one a month.

•

CONSERVATIONIST Note: This month we publish ALMOST ANCESTORS—a $3.95 book about a tribe now extinct—with a view to avoiding having the same thing happen to the human species. Awareness of the threat to survival is for everybody, not just readers of science fiction. So keep talking, keep reading, and we'll keep publishing books like THE FRAIL OCEAN, MOMENT IN THE SUN, THE POPULATION BOMB, **etcetera.** Meanwhile, does everyone have his EFFETE SNOB button?

BB

—and the music is unbelievably loud.

The dome must act as an enormous soundbox. I can feel the vibrations in my feet and my teeth are chattering with the beat—but as wild as the dancing is, the circle is still intact. Each Shaker is "shaking" in his own place. Some are uttering incomprehensible cries, the holy gibberish that the Shakers call their Gift of Tongues —ecstatic prophesies symbolizing the Wordless Word of the Deity. One young girl with a gaunt but beautiful face is howling like a coyote. Another is grunting like a pig. A third is alternately spitting into the air and slapping her own cheeks viciously with both hands.

Across the floor a tall skinny boy has shaken loose from the rim of the circle. Pirouetting at high speed, his head thrown straight back so that his eyes are fixed on the crimson membrane of the dome, he seems to be propelling himself in an erratic path toward the center of the floor. And now the dome is changing color again, clotting to a deeper purple—like the color of a late evening sky but flecked with scarlet stars that seem to be darting about with a life of their own, colliding, coalescing, reforming.

A moment of relative calm has descended on the dancers. They are standing with their hands at their sides—only their heads are moving, lolling first to one side,

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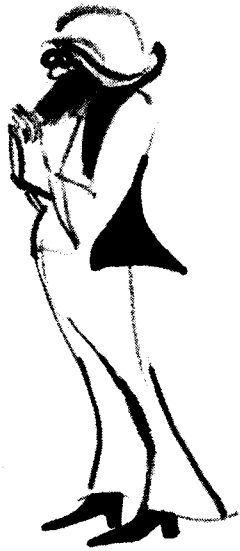
then the other, in keeping with the new, subdued rhythm of the music. The tall boy in the center has begun to spin around and around in place, picking up speed with each rotation—now he's whirling like a top, his head still bent back, his eyes staring sightlessly. His right arm shoots out from the shoulder, the elbow locked, the fingers stiff, the palm flat—this is what the Shakers call the Arrow Sign, a manifestation of the Gift of Prophecy, directly inspired by the Dual Deity, Father Power and Mother Wisdom. The tall boy is the "instrument" and he is about to receive a message from on high.

His head tilts forward. His rotation slows. He comes to a halt with his right arm pointing at a short red-haired girl. The girl begins to shake all over as if struck by a high fever. The music rises to an ear-shattering crescendo and ends in mid-note.

"Everyone's a mirror," the tall boy shouts. "Clean, clean, clean —oh, let it shine! My dirt's not my own but it stains the earth. And the earth's not my own—the Mother and Father are light above light but the light can't shine alone. Only a mirror can shine, shine, shine. Let the mirror be mine, be mine, be mine!"

The red-haired girl is shaking so hard her limbs are flailing like whips. Her mouth has fallen open and she begins to moan, barely audibly at first. What she utters



might be a single-syllable word like "clean" or "mine" or "shine" repeatedly, so rapidly that the consonants break down and the vowels flow into one unending stream of sound. But it keeps getting louder and louder and still louder, like the wail of an air-raid siren, until all resemblance to speech disappears and it seems impossible that such a sound can come from a human throat. You can almost hear the blood vessels straining, bursting.

Then the loudspeaker cuts in again in mid-note with the loudest, wildest jag-rock riff I have ever heard, only it's no longer something you can hear—it's inside you or you're inside it. And the

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dome has burst into blooms of color! A stroboscopic fireworks display that obliterates all outlines and shatters perspective and you can't tell whether the dancers are moving very, very slowly or very, very fast. The movement is so perfectly synchronized with the sound and the sound with the color that there seems to be no fixed reference point anywhere.

All you can say is: "There is color, there is sound, there is movement—"

This is the Gift of Seizure, which the New Shakers prize so highly—and whether it is genuinely mystical, as they claim, or autohypnotic or drug-induced, as some critics maintain, or a combination of all of these or something else entirely, it is an undeniably real—and profoundly disturbing—experience.

XEROGRAM: July 1 (7:27 A.M.)
TO: Frederick Rickover, Eastern Supervisor, Feel-O-Mat Corp., Baltimore, Maryland, 6503477502
FROM: Raymond Senter, Hudson Junction Rotel, Hudson Junction, N.Y. 28997601910
(WARNING: PERSONALIZED ENVELOPE: CONTENTS WILL POWDER IF OPENED IMPROPERLY)

Fred:

I'm afraid it's back-scratching time again. I need a code-check on DNA No. 75/62/HR/tl/4-9-06[5]. I'm interested in whether the codee has plugged into a feel-o-mat anywhere in the Federation during the past two weeks. *This one's a family matter,* not business, so buzz me only at the above zip. I won't forget it. Gratefully, Ray.

TO: Stock. Ex-Ed., *I.I.*
FROM: Senter
ENCLOSED: Three tapes. New Shaker "testimonies." Edited transcripts, July 1.

TAPE I (Shaker name, "Farmer Brown"): What kind of mike is this? No kidding. I didn't know they made a re-amper this small. Chinese? Oh. Right. Well, let's see—I was born April seventeenth, nineteen-seventy-four, in Ellsworth, Saskatchewan. My breath-father's a foremen at a big refinery there. My breath-mother was a consumer-housewife. She's gone over now. It's kind of hard to remember details. When I was real little, I think I saw the feds scratch a Bomb-thrower on the steps of City Hall. But maybe that was only something I saw on 2-D. School was—you know, the usual. Oh, once a bunch of us kids got hold of some fresh spores from the refinery—I guess we stole them somehow. Anyway,

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there was still a lot of open land around and we planted them and raised our own crop of puffers. I didn't come down for a week. That was my farming experience. (LAUGHTER) I applied for a bummer-grant on my fifteenth birthday, got a two-year contract and took off the next day for the sun. Let's see—Minneapolis, Kansas City, Mexico—what a jolt! There weren't so many feel-o-mats in the small towns down there and I was into all the hard stuff you could get in those days—speed, yellow, rock-juice, little-annie—I guess the only thing I never tried for a jolt was the Process and there were times when I was just about ready.

When the grant ran out, I just kept bumming on my own. At first you think it's going to be real easy. Half the people you know are still on contract and they share it around. Then your old friends start running out faster than you make new ones and there's a whole new generation on the road. And you start feeling more and more like a feebie and acting like one. I was lucky because I met this sweet little dove in Nashville —she had a master's in Audio-Visual but she was psycho for bummers, especially flat ones.

Anyway, she comes back to her coop one day with a new tape and puts it on and says, "This'll go right through you. It's a wild new group called the Shakers."

She didn't know two bobby's worth about the Shakers and I didn't either—the first Shaker tapes were just hitting the market about then. Well, I can tell you, that jagged sound gave me a jolt. I mean, it was bigger than yellow, bigger than juice, only it let you down on your feet instead of your back. I had this feeling I had to hear more. I got all the tapes that were out but they weren't enough. So I took off one night for Wildwood and before I knew it I was in a Prep Meeting and I was home free—you know, I've always kind of hoped that little dove makes it on her own—Oh, yeah, the band.

Well, I'm one of the Band Deacons, which is what's called a Sacrificial Gift because it means handling the accounts—and that's too close to the jacks and bobbys for comfort. But someone has to do it. You can't stay alive in an impure world without getting a little stained and if outsiders want to lay the Kennedys on us for bikes and tapes, that's a necessary evil. But we don't like to spread the risk in the Family. So the Deacons sign the checks and deal with the agents and the stain's on us alone. And everyone prays a little harder to square it with the Father and Mother.

TAPE II (Shaker name, "Mariah Moses"): I was born in Darien, Connecticut. I'm an Aquarius with Leo rising. Do you want my

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breath-name? I don't mind—it's Cathy Ginsberg. My breath-parents are both full-time consumers. I didn't have a very interesting childhood, I guess: I went to Mid-Darien Modular School. I was a pretty good student—my best subject was World Culture. I consummated on my third date, which was about average, I've been told, for my class. Do you really want all this background stuff? I guess the biggest thing that happened to the old me was when I won a second prize in the Maxwell Puffer Civic Essay contest when I was fourteen. The subject was *The Joys of Spectatorism* and the prize was a Programed Weekend in Hawaii for two. I don't remember who I went with. But Hawaii was really nice. All those brown-skinned boys—we went to a big luau on Saturday night. That's a native-style orgy. They taught me things we never even learned in school.

I remember thinking, *Oh, star, this is the living end!*

But when it was all over I had another thought. If this was the living end—what came next? I don't know if it was the roast pig or what but I didn't feel so good for a few days. The night we got back home—Herbie! That was the name of my date, Herbie Alcott—he had short curly hair all over his back—anyway, the night I got home my breath-parents picked me up at the airport and on the way back to Darien they started asking me what I wanted to do with my life. They were trying to be so helpful, you know. I mean, you could see they would have been disappointed if I got involved in production of some kind but they weren't about to say that in so many words. They just asked me if I had decided how I wanted to plug into the Big Board. It was up to me to choose between college or the Consumer Corps or a Travel Grant—they even asked me if Herbie and I were getting serious and if we wanted to have a baby—because the waiting-list at the Marriage Bureau was already six-months long and getting longer. The trouble was I was still thinking about the luau and the roast pig and I felt all—burned out. Like a piece of charcoal that still looks solid but is really just white ash—and if you touch it it crumbles and blows away. So I said I'd think about it but what I was really thinking was *I'm not signing up for any more orgies just yet.*

And a few days later the miracle happened. A girl in our class was reported missing and a friend of mine heard someone say that she'd become a Shaker.

I said, "What's that?"

My friend said, "It's a religion that believes in No hate, No war, No money, No sex."

And I felt this thrill go right through me. And even though I

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didn't know what it meant at the time, that was the moment I discovered my Gift. It was such a warm feeling, like something soft and quiet curled up inside you, waiting. And the day I turned fifteen I hiked up to Jerusalem and I never went home. That was eleven months ago . . . oh, you can't describe what happens at Preparative Meeting. It's what happens inside you that counts. Like now, when I think of all my old friends from Darien, I say a little prayer.

Father Power, Mother Wisdom, touch their Gifts, set them free . . .

TAPE III (Shaker name, "Earnest Truth"): I'm aware that I'm something of a rarity here. I assume that's why you asked me for a testimony. But I don't want you categorizing me as a Shaker intellectual or a Shaker theologian or anything like that. I serve as Legal Deacon because that's my Gift. But I'm also a member of the vacuum detail in Corridor Three and that's my Gift too. I'd be just as good a Shaker if I only cleaned the floor and nothing else. Is that clear? Good. Well then, as briefly as possible: (READS FROM PREPARED TEXT) I'm twenty-four years old, from Berkeley, California. Breath-parents were on the faculty at the University; killed in an air crash when I was ten. I was raised by the state. Pacific Highlands Modular School: First honors. Consumer Corps: Media-aide First-class. Entered the University at seventeen. Pre-law. Graduated *magna cum* in nineteen-ninety. Completed four-year Law School in three years. In my final year I became interested in the literature of religion—or, to be more precise, the literature of mysticism—possibly as a counterpoise to the increasing intensity of my formal studies. Purely as an intellectual diversion I began to read St. John of the Cross, George Fox, the Vedas, Tao, Zen, the Kabbala, the Sufis. But when I came across the early Shakers I was struck at once with the daring and clarity of this purely American variant. All mystics seek spiritual union with the Void, the Nameless, the Formless, the Ineffable. But the little band of Shaker pilgrims, confronted with a vast and apparently unbounded wilderness, took a marvelous quantum leap of faith and decided that the union had already been accomplished. The wilderness was the Void. For those who had eyes to see—this was God's Kingdom. And by practicing a total communism, a total abnegation, a total dedication, they made the wilderness flower for two hundred years. Then, unable to adjust to the methodologies of the Industrial Revolution, they quietly faded away; it was as if their gentle spirit had found a final resting place in the design of their utterly simple and utterly

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beautiful wooden furniture—each piece of which has since become a collector's item. When I began reading about the Old Shakers I had of course heard about the New Shakers—but I assumed that they were just another crackpot fundamentalist sect like the Holy Rollers or the Snake Handlers, an attempt to keep alive the pieties of a simpler day in the present age of abundance. But eventually my curiosity—or so I called it at the time—led me to investigate a Preparative Meeting that had been established in the Big Sur near Jefferstown. And I found my Gift. The experience varies from individual to individual. For me it was the revelation that the complex machine we refer to as the Abundant Society is the real anachronism. All the euphorics we feed ourselves cannot change the fact that the machinery of abundance has long since reached its limit as a vital force and is now choking on its own waste products —Pollution, Overpopulation, Dehumanization. Far from being a breakthrough, the so-called Cultural Revolution was merely the last gasp of the old order trying to maintain itself by programing man's most private senses into the machine. And the childish Bomb-throwers were nothing but retarded romantics, an anachronism within an anachronism. At this juncture in history, only the Shaker Revival offers a true alternative—in the utterly simple, and therefore utterly profound, Four Noes. The secular world usually praises us for our rejection of Hate and War and mocks us for our rejection of Money and Sex. But the Four Noes constitute a beautifully balanced ethical equation, in which each term is a function of the other three. There are no easy Utopias. Non-Shakers often ask: What would happen if everyone became a Shaker? Wouldn't that be the end of the human race? My personal answer is this: Society is suffering from the sickness unto death—a plague called despair. Shakerism is the only cure. As long as the plague rages more and more people will find the strength to take the medicine required, no matter how bitter it may seem. Perhaps at some future date, the very spread of Shakerism will restore Society to health, so that the need for Shakerism will again slacken. Perhaps the cycle will be repeated. Perhaps not. It is impossible to know what the Father and Mother have planned for their children. Only one thing is certain. The last of the Old Shaker prophetesses wrote in nineteen-fifty-six: "The flame may flicker but the spark can never be allowed to die out until the salvation of the world is accomplished."

I don't think you'll find the flame flickering here.

MORE TO COME

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XEROGRAM: July 1 (11:30 P.M.)
TO: Stock, Ex-Ed., *I.I.*
FROM: Raymond Senter, c/o Hudson Junction Rotel
(WARNING: PERSONALIZED ENVELOPE: CONTENTS WILL POWDER IF OPENED IMPROPERLY)

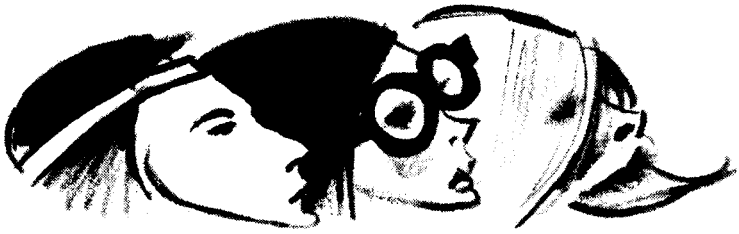
Art:

Cooperation unlimited here—until I mention "Preparative Meeting." Then they all get tongue-tied. Too holy for impure ears. No one will even say where or when. Working hypothesis: It's a compulsory withdrawl session. Recruits obviously must kick all worldly habits before taking final vows. Big question: how do they do it? Conscious or unconscious? Cold-turkey, hypnosuggestion, or re-conditioning? Legal or illegal? Even Control would like to know. I'm taping the Reception Deacon tomorrow. If you approve, I'll start putting the pressure on. The groundwork's done. We may get a story yet. Ray.

XEROGRAM: July 2 (2:15 A.M.)
TO: Joseph Harger, Coordinator, N.Y. State Consumer Control, Albany, N.Y. 3111800-2311
FROM: Raymond Senter, c/o Hudson Junction Rotel, Hudson Junction, N.Y. 28997601910
(WARNING: PERSONALIZED ENVELOPE: CONTENTS WILL POWDER IF OPENED IMPROPERLY)

Joe:

I appreciate your taking a personal interest in this matter. My wife obviously gave the wrong impression to the controller she contacted. She tends to get hysterical. Despite what she may have said I assure you my son's attitude toward the Ghetto was a perfectly healthy blend of scorn and pity. Bruce went with me once to see the Harlem Wall—must have been six or seven—and Coordinator Bill Quaite let him sit in the Scanner's chair for a few minutes. He heard a muzzein call from the top of one of those rick-



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ety towers. He saw the wild rats prowling in the stench and garbage. He also watched naked children fighting with wooden knives over a piece of colored glass. I am told there are young people today stupid enough to think that sneaking over the Wall is an adventure and that the process is reversible—but my son is definitely not one of them. And he is certainly not a bomb-thrower. I know that you have always shared my publication's view that a selective exposure to the harsher realities makes for better consumers. (I'm thinking of that little snafu in data-traffic in the Albany Grid last summer.) I hope you'll see your way clear to trusting me again. I repeat: there's not the slightest indication that my son was going over to the Blacks. In fact, I have good reason to believe that he will turn up quite soon, with all discrepancies accounted for. But I need a little time. A Missing Persons Bulletin would only make things harder at the moment. I realize it was my wife who initiated the complaint. But I'd greatly appreciate it if she got misfiled for 48 hours. I'll handle any static on this side. Discreetly, Ray

TO: Stock, Ex-Ed., *I.I.*
FROM: Senter
ENCLOSED: Background tape; interview with Antonia Cross, age 19, Reception Deacon, Jerusalem West Edited Transcript, July 2.

Q: (I waited silently for her to take the lead.)

A: Before we begin, I think we better get a few things straight. It'll save time and grief in the long run. First of all, despite what your magazine and others may have said in the past, we never proselytize. Never. So please don't use that word. We just try to live our Gift—and if other people are drawn to us, that's the work of the Father and Mother, not us. We don't have to preach. When someone's sitting in filth up to his neck he doesn't need a preacher to tell him he smells. All he needs to hear is that there's a cleaner place somewhere. Second, we don't prevent anyone from leaving, despite all rumors to the contrary. We've had exactly three apostates in the last four years. They found out their wheels were not our wheels and they left.

Q: Give me their names.

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A: There's no law that says we have to disclose the names of backsliders. Find them yourself. That shouldn't be too hard, now that they're plugged back in to the Big Board.

Q. You overestimate the power of the press.

A: False modesty is not considered a virtue among Shakers.

Q: You mentioned three backsliders. How many applicants are turned away before taking final vows?

A: The exact percentage is immaterial. Some applicants are more serious than others. There is no great mystery about our reception procedure. You've heard the expression, "Weekend Shakers." Anybody can buy the gear and dance and sing and stay pure for a couple of days. It's even considered a "jolt," I'm told. We make sure that those who come to us know the difference between a weekend and a lifetime. We explain the Gift, the Creed, the Articles of Faith. Then we ask them why they've come to us. We press them pretty hard. In the end, if they're still serious, they are sent to Preparative Meeting for a while, until a Family is ready to accept them.

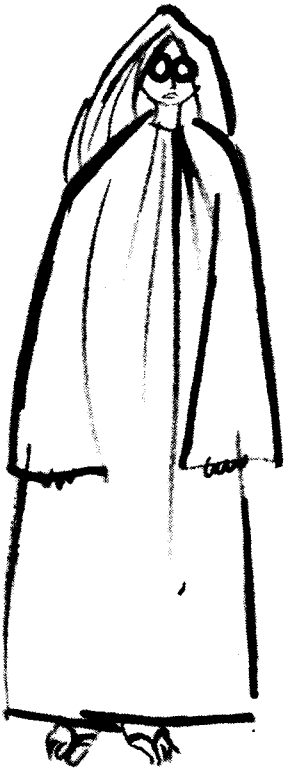
Q: How long is a while?

A: Preparative Meeting can take days or weeks. Or longer.

Q: Are they considered full-fledged Shakers during that time?

A: The moment of Induction is a spiritual, not a temporal, phenomenon.

Q: But you notify the authorities only after a recruit is accepted in a Family?



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A: We comply with all the requirements of the Full Disclosure Law.

Q: What if the recruit is underage and lies about it? Do you run a routine DNA check?

A: We obey the law.

Q: But a recruit at a Prep Meeting isn't a Shaker and so you don't have to report his presence. Is that right?

A: We've had exactly nine complaints filed against us in four years. Not one has stuck.

Q: Then you do delay acceptance until you can trace a recruit's identity?

A: I didn't say that. We believe in each person's right to redefine his set, no matter what the Big Board may say about him. But such administrative details tend to work themselves out.

Q: How? I don't understand.

A: The ways of the Father and Mother sometimes passeth understanding.

Q: You say you don't proselytize, but isn't that what your tapes are—a form of preaching? Don't most of your recruits come to you because of the tapes? And don't most of them have to be brought down from whatever they're hooked on before you'll even let them in?

A: The world—your world—is filth. From top to bottom. We try to stay as far away as we can. But we have to eat. So we sell you our tapes and our Shakerbikes. There's a calculated risk of contamination. But it works the other way too. Filth can be contaminated by purity. That's known as Salvation. It's like a tug of war. We'll see who takes the greatest risk.

Q: That's what I'm here for—to see at first hand. Where is the Jerusalem West Preparative Meeting held?

A: Preparative Meetings are private. For the protection of all concerned.

Q: Don't you mean secret? Isn't there something going on at these meetings that you don't want the public to know?

A: If the public is ignorant of the life of the spirit, that is hardly our fault.

Q: Some people believe that your recruits are "prepared" with drugs or electro-conditioning.

A: Some people think that Shaker stew is full of saltpeter. Are you going to print that, too?

Q: You have been accused of brain-tampering. That's a serious charge. And unless I get a hell of a lot more cooperation from you than I've been getting I will have to

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assume that you have something serious to hide.

A: No one ever said you'd be free to see everything. You'll just have to accept our—guidance—in matters concerning religious propriety.

Q: Let me give you a little guidance, Miss Cross. You people already have so many enemies in that filthy world you despise that one unfriendly story from *I.I.* might just tip the scales.

A: The power of the press? We'll take our chances.

Q: What will you do if the police crack down?

A: We're not afraid to die. And the Control authorities have found that it's more trouble than it's worth to put us in jail. We seem to upset the other inmates.

Q: Miss Cross—

A: We use no titles here. My name is Antonia.

Q: You're obviously an intelligent, dedicated young woman. I would rather work with you than against you. Why don't we try to find some middle ground? As a journalist my primary concern is human nature—what happens to a young recruit in the process of becoming a full-fledged Shaker. You won't let me into a Prep Meeting to see for myself. All right, you have your reasons, and I respect them. But I ask you to respect mine. If I can look through your Reception files—just the last two or three weeks will do—I should be able to get some idea of what kind of raw material you draw on. You can remove the names, of course.

A: Perhaps we can provide a statistical breakdown for you.

Q: I don't want statistics. I want to look at their pictures, listen to their voices—you say you press them pretty hard in the first interview. That's what I need: their responses under pressure, the difference between those who stick it through and those who don't.

A: How do we know you're not looking for something of a personal nature—to embarrass us?

Q: For God's sakes, I'm one of the best-known tapemen in the Federation. Why not just give me the benefit of the doubt?

A: You invoke a Deity that means nothing to you.

Q: I'm sorry.

A: The only thing I can do is transmit your request to the Octave itself. Any decision on such a matter would have to come from a Full Business Meeting.

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Q: How long will it take?
A: The Octave is meeting tomorrow, before Evening Service.
Q: All right. I can wait till then. I suppose I should apologize again for losing my temper. I'm afraid it's an occupational hazard.
A: We all have our Gift.

MORE TO COME

TO: Stock, Ex-Ed., *I.I.*
FROM: Senter
ENCLOSED: First add on Shaker Revival; July 3.

It is unclear whether the eight teenagers—six boys and two girls—who banded together one fateful evening in the spring of 1991 to form a jag-rock combo called The Shakers had any idea of the religious implications of the name. According to one early account in *Riff* magazine, the original eight were thinking only of a classic rock-and-roll number of the nineteen-fifties *Shake, Rattle and Roll* (a title not without sexual as well as musicological overtones). On the other hand, there is evidence that Harry G was interested in astrology, palmistry, scientology and other forms of modern occultism even before he left home at the age of fifteen. (Harry G was born Harry Guardino, on December eighteen, nineteen-seventy-four, in Schoodic, Maine, the son of a third-generation lobster fisherman.) Like many members of his generation he applied for a Federal Travel Grant on graduation from Modular School and received a standard two-year contract. But unlike most of his fellow-bummers, Harry did not immediately take off on an all-expenses-paid tour of the seamier side of life in the North American Federation. Instead, he hitched a ride to New York City, where he established a little basement coop on the lower west side that soon became a favorite way-station for other, more restless bummers passing through the city. No reliable account of this period is available. The rumors that he dabbled in a local Bomb-throwers cell appear to be unfounded. But it is known that sometime during the spring of nineteen-ninety-one a group of bummers nearing the end of their grants gathered in Harry G's coop to discuss the future. By coincidence or design the eight young people who came together that night from the far corners of the Federation all played some instrument and shared a passion for jag-rock. And as they talked and argued among themselves about the best way possible to "plug into the Big Board," it slowly began to dawn on them that perhaps their destinies were linked—or, as Harry G himself has put it, "We felt we could make beautiful music to-

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gether. Time has made us one."

Building a reputation in the jag-rock market has never been easy—not even with divine intervention. For the next two months, The Shakers scrambled for work, playing a succession of one-night stands in consumers' centers, schools, fraternal lodges—wherever someone wanted live entertainment and was willing to put the group up. The Shakers traveled in a second-hand Chevrolet van which was kept running only by the heroic efforts of the group's electric-oud player, Richard Fitzgerald (who later—as Richard F—helped to design the improved version of the turbo-adapter which forms the basis of today's Shaker-bike.)

On the night of June the first the group arrived in Hancock, Massachusetts, where they were scheduled to play the next evening at the graduation dance of the Grady L. Parker Modular School. They had not worked for three days and their finances had reached a most precarious stage—they were now sharing only four bummer-grants between them, the other four contracts having expired in the previous weeks. From the very beginning of their relationship the eight had gone everywhere and done everything as a group—they even insisted on sleeping together in one room on the theory that the "bad vibrations" set up by an overnight absence from each other might adversely affect their music. As it turned out, there was no room large enough at the local Holiday Inn, so, after some lengthy negotiations, the Modular School principal arranged for them to camp out on the grounds of the local Shaker Museum, a painstaking restoration of an early New England Shaker community dating back to seventeen-ninety. Amused but not unduly impressed by the coincidence in names, the eight Shakers bedded down for the night within sight of the Museum's most famous structure, the Round Stone Barn erected by the original Shakers in eighteen-twenty-six. Exactly what happened between midnight and dawn on that fog-shrouded New England meadow may never be known—the validation of mystical experience being by its very nature a somewhat inexact science. According to Shaker testimony, however, the spirit of Mother Ann, sainted foundress of the original sect, touched the Gifts of the eight where they lay and in a vision of the future—which Amelia D later said was "as clear and bright as a holograph"—revealed why they had been chosen: The time had come for a mass revival of Shaker beliefs and practices. The eight teenagers awoke at the same instant, compared visions, found them to be identical and wept together for joy. They spent the rest

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of the day praying for guidance and making plans. Their first decision was to play as scheduled at the Grady L. Parker graduation dance.

"We decided to go on doing just what we had been doing—only more so," Amelia D later explained. "Also, I guess, we needed the jacks."

WHATEVER the reason, the group apparently played as never before. Their music opened up doors to whole new ways of hearing and feeling—or so it seemed to the excited crowd of seniors who thronged around the bandstand when the first set was over. Without any premeditation, or so he later claimed, Harry Guardino stood up and announced the new Shaker dispensation, including the Believers' Creed (the Four Noes) and a somewhat truncated version of the Articles of Faith of the United Society of Believers (Revived): "All things must be kept decent and in good order," "Diversity in Uniformity," and "Work is Play." According to the Hancock newspaper, seventeen members of the senior class left town that morning with the Shakers—in three cars "borrowed" from parents and later returned. Drawn by a Gift of Travel, the little band of pilgrims made their way to the quiet corner of New York State now known as Jerusalem West, bought some land—with funds obtained from anonymous benefactors—and settled down to their strange experiment in monastic and ascetic communism.

The actual historical connections between Old Shakers and New Shakers remains a matter of conjecture. It is not clear, for instance, whether Harry G and his associates had a chance to consult the documentary material on display at the Hancock Museum. There is no doubt that the First Article of Faith of the Shaker Revival is a word-for-word copy of the first part of an early Shaker motto. But it has been given a subtly different meaning in present-day usage. And while many of the New Shaker doctrines and practices can be traced to the general tenor of traditional Shakerism, the adaptations are often quite free and sometimes wildly capricious. All in all, the Shaker Revival seems to be very much a product of our own time. Some prominent evolutionists even see it as part of a natural process of weeding out those individuals incapable of becoming fully consuming members of the Abundant Society. They argue that Shakerism is a definite improvement, in this respect, over the youthful cult of Bomb-throwers which had to be suppressed in the early days of the Federation.

But there are other observers who see a more ominous trend at

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work. They point especially to the serious legal questions raised by the Shaker's efforts at large-scale proselytization. The twenty-seventh Amendment to the Federal Constitution guarantees the right of each white citizen over the age of fifteen to the free and unrestricted enjoyment of his own senses, provided that such enjoyment does not interfere with the range or intensity of any other citizen's sensual enjoyment. Presumably this protection also extends to the right of any white citizen to deny himself the usual pleasures. But what is the status of corporate institutions that engage in such repression? How binding, for example, is the Shaker recruit's sworn allegiance to the Believers' Creed? How are the Four Noes enforced within the sect? Suppose two Shakers find themselves physically attracted to each other and decide to consummate —does the United Society of Believers have any right to place obstacles between them? These are vital questions that have yet to be answered by the Control authorities. But there are influential men in Washington who read the twenty-seventh amendment as an obligation on the government's part not merely to protect the individual's right to sensual pleasure but also to help him maximize it. And in the eyes of these broad constructionists the Shakers are on shaky ground.

TO: Stock, Ex-Ed., *I. I.*
FROM: Senter
(WARNING: CONFIDENTIAL UNEDITED TAPE: NOT FOR PUBLICATION: CONTENTS WILL POWDER IF OPENED IMPROPERLY)

FIRST VOICE: Bruce? Is that you?

SECOND VOICE: It's me.

FIRST: For God's sake, come in! Shut the door. My God, I thought you were locked up in that Prep Meeting. I thought—

SECOND: It's not a prison. When I heard you were prowling around town I knew I had to talk to you.

FIRST: You've changed your mind then?

SECOND: Don't believe it. I just wanted to make sure you didn't lie about everything.

FIRST: Do they know you're here?

SECOND: No one followed me, if that's what you mean. No one even knows who I am. I've redefined my set, as we say.

FIRST: But they check. They're not fools. They'll find out soon enough—if they haven't already.

SECOND: They don't check. That's another lie. And anyway, I'll tell them myself after Induction.

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FIRST: Brucie—it's not too late. We want you to come home.

SECOND: You can tell Arlene that her little baby is safe and sound. How is she? Blubbering all over herself as usual?

FIRST: She's pretty broken up about your running away.

SECOND: Why? Is she worried they'll cut off her credit at the feel-o-mat? For letting another potential consumer get off the hook?

FIRST: You wouldn't have risked coming to me if you didn't have doubts. Don't make a terrible mistake.

SECOND: I came to see you because I know how you can twist other people's words. Are you recording this?

FIRST: Yes.

SECOND: Good. I'm asking you straight out—please leave us alone.

FIRST: Do you know they're tampering with your mind?

SECOND: Have you tasted your local drinking water lately?

FIRST: Come home with me.

SECOND: I am home.

FIRST: You haven't seen enough of the world to turn your back on it.

SECOND: I've seen you and Arlene.

FIRST: And is our life so awful?

SECOND: What you and Arlene have isn't life. It's the American Dream Come True. You're in despair and don't even know it. That's the worse kind.

FIRST: You repeat the slogans as if you believed them.

SECOND: What makes you think I don't?

FIRST: You're my flesh and blood. I know you.

SECOND: You don't. All you know is that your little pride and joy ran away to become a monk and took the family genes. And Arlene is too old go back to the Big Board and beg for seconds.

FIRST: Look—I know a little something about rebellion, too. I've had a taste of it in my time. It's healthy, it's natural—I'm all for it. But not an overdose. When the jolt wears off, you'll be stuck here. And you're too smart to get trapped in a hole like this.

SECOND: It's my life, isn't it? In exactly one hour and ten minutes I'll be free, white and fifteen—Independence Day, right? What a beautiful day to be born—it's the nicest thing you and Arlene did for me.

FIRST: Brucie, we want you back. Whatever you want—just name it and if it's in my power I'll try to get it. I

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have friends who will help.

SECOND: I don't want anything from you. We're quits—can't you understand? The only thing we have in common now is this: (SOUND OF HEAVY BREATHING). That's it. And if you want that back you can take it. Just hold your hand over my mouth and pinch my nose for about five minutes. That should do it.

FIRST: How can you joke about it?

SECOND: Why not? Haven't you heard? There're only two ways to go for my generation—The Shakers or the Ghetto. How do you think I'd look in black-face with bushy hair and a gorilla nose? Or do you prefer my first choice?

FIRST: I'm warning you, the country's not going to put up with either much longer. There's going to be trouble—and I want you out of here when it comes.

SECOND: What are the feebies going to do? Finish our job for us?

FIRST: Is that what you want then? To commit suicide?

SECOND: Not exactly. That's what the Bomb-throwers did. We want to commit your suicide.

FIRST: (Words unintelligible.)

SECOND: That really jolts you, doesn't it? You talk about rebellion as if you knew something about it because you wore beads once and ran around holding signs.

FIRST: We changed history.

SECOND: You didn't change anything. You were swallowed up, just like the Bomb-throwers. The only difference is, you were eaten alive.

FIRST: Bruce—

SECOND: Can you stretch the gray-stuff a little, and try to imagine what real rebellion would be like? Not just another chorus of "gimme, gimme, gimme—" But the absolute negation of what's come before? The Four Noes all rolled up into One Big No!

FIRST: Brucie—I'll make a deal—

SECOND: No one's ever put it all together before. I don't expect you to see it. Even around here, a lot of people don't know what's happening. Expiation! That's what rebellion is all about. The young living down the sins of the fathers and mothers! But the young are always so hungry for life they get distracted before they can finish the job. Look at all the poor, doomed rebels in his-

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tory whenever they got too big to be crushed the feebies bought them off with a piece of the action. The stick or the carrot and then—business as usual. Your generation was the biggest sellout of all. But the big laugh is, you really thought you won. So now you don't have any carrot left to offer, because you've already shared it all with us—before we got old. And we're strong enough to laugh at your sticks. Which is why the world is going to find out for the first time what total rebellion is.

FIRST: I thought you didn't believe in violence and hate?

SECOND: Oh, our strength is not of this world. You can forget all the tapes and bikes and dances—that's the impure shell that must be sloughed off. If you want to get the real picture, just imagine us—all your precious little gene-machines—standing around in a circle, our heads bowed in prayer, holding our breaths and clicking off one by one. Don't you think that's a beautiful way for your world to end? Not with a bang or a whimper—but with one long breathless Amen?

MORE TO COME

TO: Stock, Ex-Ed., *I.I.*
FROM: Senter
ENCLOSED: New first add on "Shaker Revival" (scratch earlier transmission; new lead upcoming).

JERUSALEM WEST, N.Y., Wednesday, July 4—An early critic of the Old Shakers, a robust pamphleteer who had actually been a member of the sect for ten months, wrote this prophetic appraisal of his former cohorts in the year seventeen-eighty-two: "When we consider the infant state of civil power in America since the Revolution began, every infringement on the natural rights of humanity, every effort to undermine our original constitution, either in civil or ecclesiastical order, saps the foundation of Independency."

That winter, the Shaker foundress, Mother Ann, was seized in Petersham, Massachusetts, by a band of vigilantes who, according to a contemporary account, wanted "to find out whether she was a woman or not." Various other Shaker leaders were horsewhipped, thrown in jail, tarred and feathered and driven out of one New England town after another by an aroused citizenry. These severe persecutions, which lasted through the turn of the century, were the almost inevitable outcome of a clash between the self-righteous, unnatural, uncom-

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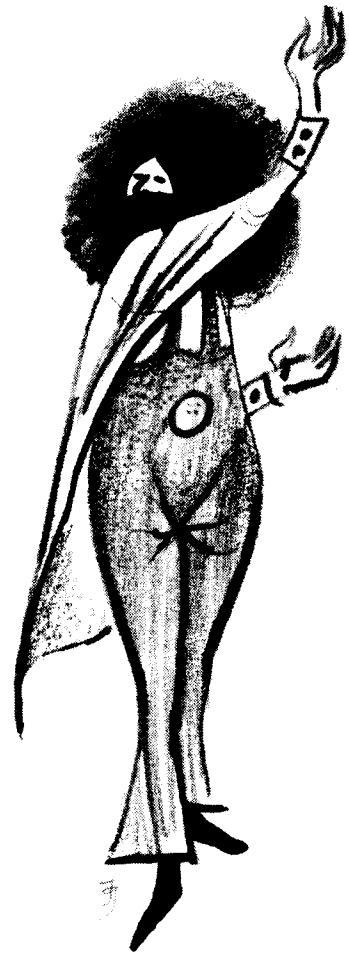
promising doctrines of the Shakers —and the pragmatic, democratic, forward-looking mentality of the struggling new nation, which would one day be summed up in that proud emblem: The American Way of Life.

This conflict is no less sharp today. So far the New Shakers have generally been given the benefit of the doubt as just another harmless fringe group. But there is evidence that the mood of the country is changing—and rapidly. Leading educators and political figures, respected clergymen and prominent consumer consultants have all become more outspoken in denouncing the disruptive effect of this new fanaticism on the country as a whole. Not since the heyday of the Bomb-throwers in the late Seventies has a single issue shown such potential for galvanizing informed public opinion. And a chorus of distraught parents has only just begun to make itself heard—like the lamentations of Rachel in the wilderness.

Faced with the continuing precariousness of the international situation, and the unresolved dilemma of the Ghettoes, some Control authorities have started talking about new restrictions on all monastic sects—not out of any desire to curtail religious freedom but in an effort to preserve the constitutional guarantees of free expression and consumption. Some feel that if swift, firm governmental action is not forthcoming it will get harder and harder to prevent angry parents—and others with legitimate grievances —from taking the law into their own hands.

MORE TO COME ★



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SLOW SCULPTURE

THEODORE STURGEON

She was lost in terror—he was beyond it. They could survive only if they abandoned reason!

HE didn't know who he was when she met him--well, not many people did. He was in the high orchard doing something under a pear tree. The land smelled of

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late summer and wind—bronze, it smelled bronze.

He looked up at a compact girl in her mid-twenties, at a fearless face and eyes the same color as her hair, which was extraordinary because her hair was red-gold. She looked down at a leather-skinned man in his forties, at a gold-leaf electroscope in his hand, and felt she was an intruder.

She said, "Oh—" in what was apparently the right way.

Because he nodded once and said, "Hold this—" and there could then be no thought of intrusion.

She kneeled down beside him and took the instrument, holding it exactly where he positioned her hand. He moved away a little and struck a tuning fork against his kneecap.

"What's it doing?"

He had a good voice, the kind of voice strangers notice and listen to.

She looked at the delicate leaves of gold in the glass shield of the electroscope.

"They're moving apart."

He struck the tuning fork again and the leaves pressed away from one another.

"Much?"

"About forty-five degrees when you hit the fork."

"Good—that's about the most we'll get." From a pocket of his bush jacket he drew a sack of chalk dust and dropped a small handful on the ground. "I'll move now. You stay right there and tell me how much the leaves separate."

He traveled around the pear tree in a zigzag course, striking his tuning fork while she called out numbers—ten degrees, thirty, five, twenty, nothing. Whenever the gold foil pressed apart to maximum—forty degrees or more—he dropped more chalk. When he was finished the tree was surrounded by a rough oval of white dots. He took out a notebook and diagramed them and the tree, put away the book and took the electroscope out of her hands.

"Were you looking for something?" he asked her.

"No," she said. "Yes."

He could smile. Though it did not last long she found the expression surprising in a face like his.

"That's not what is called, in a court of law, a responsive answer."

She glanced across the hillside, metallic in that late light. There wasn't much on it—rocks, weeds the summer was done with, a tree or so, the orchard. Anyone present had come a long way to get here.

"It wasn't a simple question," she said, tried to smile and burst into tears.

She was sorry and said so.

"Why?" he asked.

This was the first time she was to experience this ask-the-next-question thing of his. It was un-

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settling. It always would be—never less, sometimes a great deal more.

"Well—one doesn't have emotional explosions in public."

"You do. I don't know this 'one' you're talking about."

"I—guess I don't either, now that you mention it."

"Tell the truth then. No sense in going around and around about it: *He'll think that I* . . . and the like. I'll think what I think, whatever you say. Or—go down the mountain and just don't say any more." She did not turn to go, so he added: "Try the truth, then. If it's important, it's simple. And if it's simple it's easy to say."

"I'm going to die!" she cried.

"So am I."

"I have a lump in my breast."

"Come up to the house and I'll fix it."

WITHOUT another word he turned away and started through the orchard. Startled half out of her wits, indignant and full of insane hope, experiencing, even, a quick curl of astonished laughter, she stood for a moment watching him go and then found herself (at what point did I decide?) running after him.

She caught up with him on the uphill margin of the orchard.

"Are you a doctor?"

He appeared not to notice that she had waited, had run.

"No," he said and, walking on, appeared not to see her stand again pulling at her lower lip, then run again to catch up.

"I must be out of my mind," she said, joining him on a garden path.

She said it to herself. He must have known because he did not answer. The garden was alive with defiant chrysanthemums and a pond in which she saw the flicker of a pair of redcap imperials—silver, not gold fish—the largest she had ever seen. Then—the house.

First it was part of the garden with its colonnaded terrace—and then, with its rock walls (too massive to be called fieldstone) part of the mountain. It was on and in the hillside. Its roofs paralleled the skylines, front and sides, and part of it was backed against an outjutting cliff face. The door, beamed and studded and featuring two archers' slits, was opened for them (but there was no one there) and when it closed it was silent, a far more solid exclusion of things outside than any click or clang of latch or bolt.

She stood with her back against it watching him cross what seemed to be the central well of the house, or at least this part of it. It was a kind of small court in the center of which was an atrium, glazed on all of its five sides and open to the sky at the top. In it was a tree, a cypress or juniper, gnarled and twisted and with the turnedback, paralleled, sculptured appearance of what the Japanese call bonsai.

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"Aren't you coming?" he called, holding open a door behind the atrium.

"Bonsai just aren't fifteen feet tall," she said.

"This one is."

She walked past it slowly, looking.

"How long have you had it?"

His tone of voice said he was immensely pleased. It is a clumsiness to ask the owner of a bonsai how old it is—you are then demanding to know if it is his work or if he has acquired and continued the concept of another; you are tempting him to claim for his own the concept and the meticulous labor of someone else and it becomes rude to tell a man he is being tested. Hence, *How long have you had it?* is polite, forbearing, profoundly courteous.

He answered, "Half my life."

She looked at the tree. Trees can be found, sometimes, not quite discarded, not quite forgotten, potted in rusty gallon cans in not quite successful nurseries, unsold because they are shaped oddly or have dead branches here and there, or because they have grown too slowly in whole or part. These are the ones which develop interesting trunks and a resistance to misfortune that makes them flourish if given the least excuse for living. This one was far older than half this man's life, or all of it. Looking at it, she was terrified by the unbidden thought that a fire, a family of squirrels, some subterranean worm or termite could end this beauty—something working outside any concept of rightness or justice or—of respect.

She looked at the tree. She looked at the man.

"Coming?"

"Yes," she said and went with him into his laboratory. "Sit down over there and relax," he told her. "This might take a little while."

"Over there" was a big leather chair by the bookcase. The books were right across the spectrum—reference works in medicine and engineering, nuclear physics, chemistry, biology, psychiatry. Also tennis, gymnastics, chess, the oriental war game Go, and golf. And then drama, the techniques of fiction, *Modern English Usage, The American Language* and supplement, Wood's and Walker's *Rhyming Dictionaries* and an array of other dictionaries and encyclopedias. A whole long shelf of biographies.

"You have quite a library."

He answered her rather shortly—clearly he did not want to talk just now, for he was very busy.

He said only, "Yes I have—perhaps you'll see it some time—" which left her to pick away at his words to find out what on earth he meant by them.

He could only have meant, she decided, that the books beside her chair were what he kept handy for his work—that his real library was

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elsewhere. She looked at him with a certain awe.

AND she watched him. She liked the way he moved—swiftly, decisively. Clearly he knew what he was doing. He used some equipment that she recognized—a glass still, titration equipment, a centrifuge. There were two refrigerators, one of which was not a refrigerator at all, for she could see the large indicator on the door. It stood at 70°F. It came to her that a modern refrigerator is perfectly adaptable to the demand for controlled environment, even a warm one.

But all that—and the equipment she did not recognize—was only furniture. It was the man who was worth watching, the man who kept her occupied so that not once in all the long time she sat there was she tempted toward the bookshelves.

At last he finished a long sequence at the bench, threw some switches, picked up a tall stool and came over to her. He perched on the stool, hung his heels on the cross-spoke and lay a pair of long brown hands over his knees.

"Scared."

He made it a statement.

"I suppose I am."

"You don't have to stay."

"Considering the alternative—" she began bravely but the courage-sound somehow oozed out. "It can't matter much."

"Very sound," he said almost cheerfully. "I remember when I was a kid there was a fire scare in the apartment house where we lived. It was a wild scramble to get out and my ten-year-old brother found himself outside in the street with an alarm clock in his hand. It was an old one and it didn't work—but of all the things in the place he might have snatched up at a time like that, it turned out to be the clock. He's never been able to figure out why."

"Have you?"

"Not why he picked that particular thing—no. But I think I know why he did something obviously irrational. You see, panic is a very special state. Like fear and flight, or fury and attack, it's a pretty primitive reaction to extreme danger. It's one of the expressions of the will to survive. What makes it so special is that it's irrational. Now, why would the abandonment of reason be a survival mechanism?"

She thought about this seriously. There was that about this man which made serious thought imperative.

"I can't imagine," she said finally. "Unless it's because, in some situations, reason just doesn't work."

"You can imagine," he said, again radiating that huge approval, making her glow. "And you just did. If you are in danger and you try reason and reason doesn't work—you abandon it. You can't say

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it's unintelligent to abandon what doesn't work, right? So then you are in panic. You start to perform random acts. Most of them—far and away most—will be useless. Some might even be dangerous. But that doesn't matter—you're in danger already. Where the survival factor comes in is that away down deep you know that one chance in a million is better than no chance at all. So—here you sit—you're scared and you could run. Something says you should run but you won't."

She nodded.

He went on: "You found a lump. You went to a doctor and he made some tests and gave you the bad news. Maybe you went to another doctor and he confirmed it. You then did some research and found out what was to happen next—the exploratory, the radical, the questionable recovery, the whole long agonizing procedure of being what they call a terminal case. You then flipped out. Did some things you hope I won't ask you about. Took a trip somewhere, anywhere, wound up in my orchard for no reason." He spread the good hands and let them go back to their kind of sleep. "Panic. The reason for little boys in their pajamas standing at midnight with a broken alarm clock in their arms—and for the existence of quacks." Something chimed over on the bench and he gave her a quick smile and went back to work, saying over his shoulder, "I'm not a quack, by the way. To qualify as a quack you have to claim to be a doctor. I don't."

She watched him switch off, switch on, stir, measure and calculate. A little orchestra of equipment chorused and soloed around him as he conducted, whirring, hissing, clicking, flickering. She wanted to laugh, to cry and to scream. She did not one of these things for fear of not stopping, ever.

When he came over again, the conflict was not raging within her but was exerting steady and opposed tensions. The result was a terrible stasis and all she could do when she saw the instrument in his hand was to widen her eyes. She quite forgot to breathe.

"Yes, it's a needle," he said, his tone almost bantering. "A long shiny sharp needle. Don't tell me you are one of those needle-shy people." He flipped the long power cord that trailed from the black housing around the hypodermic to get some slack, straddled the stool. "Want something to steady your nerves?"

She was afraid to speak. The membrane containing her sane self was very thin, stretched very tight.

He said, "I'd rather you didn't, because this pharmaceutical stew is complex enough as it is. But if you need it—"

She managed to shake her head a little and again felt the wave of

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approval from him. There were a thousand questions she wanted to ask—had meant to ask—needed to ask. What was in the needle? How many treatments must she have? What would they be like? How long must she stay and where? And most of all—oh, could she live, could she live?

II

HE SEEMED concerned with the answer to only one of these.

"It's mostly built around an isotope of potassium. If I told you all I know about it and how I came on it in the first place it would take—well, more time than we've got. But here's the general idea. Theoretically, every atom is electrically balanced—never mind ordinary exceptions. Likewise all electrical charges in the molecule are supposed to be balanced—so much plus, so much minus, total zero. I happened on the fact that the balance of charges in a wild cell is not zero—not quite. It's as if there were a submicroscopic thunderstorm going on at the molecular level, with little lightning bolts flashing back and forth and changing the signs. Interfering with communications—static—and that," he said, gesturing with the shielded hypo in his hand, "is what this is all about. When something interferes with communications—especially the RNA mechanism that says, *Read this blueprint, build accordingly and stop when it's done*—when that message gets garbled lopsided things get built. Off balance things. Things that do almost what they should, do it almost right—they're wild cells and the messages they pass on are even worse.

"Okay. Whether these thunderstorms are caused by viruses or chemicals or radiation or physical trauma or even anxiety—and don't think anxiety can't do it—is secondary. The important thing is to fix it so the thunderstorm can't happen. If you can do that the cells have plenty of ability all by themselves to repair and replace what's gone wrong. And biological systems aren't like ping-pong balls with static charges waiting for the charge to leak away or to discharge into a grounded wire. They have a kind of resilience—I call it forgiveness—that enables them to take on a little more charge, or a little less, and do all right. Well, then—say a certain clump of cells is wild and say it carries an aggregate of a hundred units extra on the positive side. Cells immediately around it are affected—but not the next layer or the next.

"If they could be opened to the extra charge—if they could help to drain it off—they would, well, *cure* the wild cells of the surplus. You see what I mean? And they would be able to handle that little overage themselves or pass it on to other cells and still others who could deal with it. In other words,

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if I can flood your body with a medium that can drain off and distribute a concentration of this unbalanced charge, the ordinary bodily processes will be free to move in and clear up the wild-cell damage. And that's what I have here."

He held the shielded needle between his knees and from a side pocket of his lab coat he took a plastic box, opened it and drew out an alcohol swab. Still cheerfully talking, he took her terror-numbed arm and scrubbed at the inside of her elbow.

"I am not for one second implying that nuclear charges in the atom are the same thing as static electricity. They're in a different league altogether. But the analogy holds. I could use another analogy. I could liken the charge in the wild cells to accumulations of fat. And this gunk of mine to a detergent that would break it up and spread it so far it couldn't be detected any more. But I'm led to the static analogy by an odd side effect—organisms injected with this stuff do build up one hell of a static charge. It's a byproduct and, for reasons I can only theorize about at the moment, it seems to be keyed to the audio spectrum. Tuning forks and the like. That's what I was playing with when I met you. That tree is drenched with this stuff. It used to have a whorl of wild-cell growth. It hasn't any more."

He gave her the quick, surprising smile and let it flicker away as he held the needle point upward and squirted it. With his other hand wrapped around her left bicep he squeezed gently and firmly. The needle was lowered and placed and slid into the big vein so deftly that she gasped—not because it hurt but because it did not. Attentively he watched the bit of glass barrel protruding from the black housing as he withdrew the plunger a fraction and saw the puff of red into the colorless fluid inside.

Then he bore steadily on the plunger again.

"PLEASE don't move. I'm sorry, this will take a little time. I have to get quite a lot of this into you. Which is fine, you know," he said, resuming the tone of his previous remarks about audio spectra, "because side effect or no, it's consistent. Healthy bio systems develop a strong electrostatic field, unhealthy ones a weak one or none at all. With an instrument as primitive and simple as that little electroscope you can tell if any part of the organism has a community of wild cells and if so, where it is and how big and how wild." Deftly he shifted his grip on the encased hypodermic without moving the point or varying the plunger pressure. It was beginning to be uncomfortable—an ache turning into a bruise. "And if you're wondering why this mosquito has a housing on it with a wire attached (although I'll bet

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you're not and that you know as well as I do that I'm doing all this talking just to keep your mind occupied) I'll tell you. It's nothing but a coil carrying a high-frequency alternating current. The alternating field sees to it that the fluid is magnetically and electrostatically neutral right from the start."

He withdrew the needle suddenly and smoothly, bent an arm and trapped in the inside of her elbow a cotton swab.

"Nobody ever told me that after a treatment," she said.

"What?"

"No charge," she said.

Again that wave of approval, this time with words: "I like your style. How do you feel?"

She cast about for accurate phrases.

"Like the owner of a large sleeping hysteria begging someone not to wake it up."

He laughed.

"In a little while you are going to feel so weird you won't have time for hysteria."

He got up and returned the needle to the bench, looping up the cable as he went. He turned off the AC field and returned with a large glass bowl and a square of plywood. He inverted the bowl on the floor near her and placed the wood on its broad base.

"I remember something like that," she said. "When I was in—in junior high school. They were generating artificial lightning with a—let me see—well, it had a long, endless belt running over pulleys and some little wires scraping on it and a big copper ball on top."

"Van de Graaf generator."

"Right. And they did all sorts of things with it. But what I specially remember is standing on a piece of wood on a bowl like that and they charged me up with the generator. I didn't feel much of anything except all my hair stood out from my head. Everyone laughed. I looked like a golliwog. They said I was carrying forty thousand volts."

"Good. I'm glad you remember that. This'll be a little different, though. By roughly another forty thousand."

"Oh!"

"Don't worry. As long as you're insulated and as long as grounded or comparatively grounded objects—me, for example—stay well away from you, there won't be any fireworks."

"Are you going to use a generator like that?"

"Not like that—and I already did. You're the generator."

"I'm—oh!" She had raised her hand from the upholstered chair arm and there was a crackle of sparks and the faint smell of ozone.

"You sure are and more than I thought—and quicker. Get up."

She started up slowly. She finished the maneuver with speed. As her body separated from the chair she was, for a fractional second,

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seated in a tangle of spitting blue-white threads. They, or she, propelled her a yard and a half away, standing. Literally shocked half out of her wits, she almost fell.

"Stay on your feet," he snapped and she recovered, gasping. He stepped back a pace. "Get up on the board. Quickly now."

She did as she was told, leaving, for the two paces she traveled, two brief footprints of fire. She teetered on the board. Visibly, her hair began to stir.

"What's happening to me?" she cried.

"You're getting charged after all," he said jovially but at this point she failed to appreciate the extension of even her own witticism.

She cried again, "What's happening to me?"

"It's all right," he said consolingly.

He went to the bench and turned on a tone generator. It moaned deep in the one to three hundred cycle range. He increased the volume and turned the pitch control. It howled upward and, as it did so, her red-gold hair shivered and swept up and out, each hair attempting frantically to get away from all the others. He ran the tone up above ten thousand cycles and all the way back to a belly-bumping inaudible eleven. At the extremes her hair slumped but at around eleven hundred it stood out in, as she had described it, golliwog style. She could feel it.

He turned down the gain to a more or less bearable level and picked up the electroscope. He came toward her, smiling.

"You are an electroscope, you know that? And a living Van de Graaf generator as well. And a golliwog."

"Let me down," was all she could say.

"Not yet. Please hang tight. The differential between you and everything else here is so high that if you got near any of it you'd discharge into it. It wouldn't harm you—it isn't current electricity—but you might get a burn and a nervous shock out of it." He held out the electroscope. Even at that distance—and in her distress—she could see the gold leaves writhe apart. He circled her, watching the leaves attentively, moving the instrument forward and back and from side to side. Once he went to the tone generator and turned it down some more. "You're sending such a strong field I can't pick up the variations," he explained and returned to her, coming closer now.

"I can't—much more—I can't," she murmured.

He did not hear or he did not care. He moved the electroscope near her abdomen, up and from side to side.

"Yup. There you are," he said cheerfully, moving the instrument close to her right breast.

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"What?" she whimpered.

"Your cancer. Right breast, low, around toward the armpit." He whistled. "A mean one, too. Malignant as hell."

She swayed and then collapsed forward and down. A sick blackness swept down on her, receded explosively in a glare of agonizing blue-white and then crashed down on her like a mountain falling.

Place where wall meets ceiling. Another wall, another ceiling. Hadn't seen it before. Didn't matter. Don't care.

Sleep.

Place where wall meets ceiling. Something in the way. His face, close, drawn, tired—eyes awake, though, and penetrating. Doesn't matter. Don't care.

Sleep.

Place where wall meets ceiling. Down a bit, late sunlight. Over a little, rusty-gold chrysanthemums in a gold-green glass cornucopia. Something in the way again—his face.

"Can you hear me?"

Yes, but don't answer. Don't move. Don't speak.

Sleep.

It's a room, a wall, a table, a man pacing—a nighttime window and mums you'd think were alive but don't you know they're cut right off and dying?

Do they know that?

"How are you?"

Urgent, urgent.

"Thirsty."

COLD and a bite to it that aches the hinges of the jaws. Grapefruit juice. Lying back on his arm while he holds the glass in the other hand.

Oh, no, that's not . . .

"Thank you. Thanks very—"

Try to sit up. The sheet—my clothes!

"Sorry about that," he said, the mindreader-almost. "Some things that have to be done just aren't consistent with pantyhose and a minidress. All washed and dried and ready for you, though—any time. Over there."

The brown wool and the pantyhose and the shoes, on the chair.

He's respectful, standing back, putting the glass next to an insulated carafe on the night table.

"What things?"

"Throwing up. Bedpans," he said candidly.

Protective with the sheet, which can hide bodies but—oh—not embarrassment.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Oh. I must have—"

Shake head and he slides back and forth in the vision.

"You went into shock and then you just didn't come out of it."

He hesitated. It was the first time she had ever seen him hesitate over anything. She became for

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a moment an almost-mindreader.

Should I tell her what's in my mind?

Sure, he should. And he did.

"You didn't want to come out of it."

"It's all gone out of my head."

"The pear tree, the electroscope. The injection, the electrostatic response."

"No," she said, not knowing. Then, knowing: "No!"

"Hang on," he rapped and next thing she knew he was by the bed, over her, his two hands hard on her cheeks. "Don't slip off again. You can handle it. You can handle it because it's all right now, do you understand that? You're all right."

"You told me I had cancer."

She sounded pouty, accusing.

He laughed at her, actually laughed.

"You told me you had it."

"Oh, but I didn't know."

"That explains it, then," he said in a load-off-my-back tone. "There wasn't anything in what I did that could cause a three-day withdrawal like that. It had to be something in you."

"Three days!"

He simply nodded and went on with what he was saying.

"I get a little pompous once in a while," he said engagingly. "Comes from being right so much of the time. Took a bit more for granted than I should have, didn't I? When I assumed you'd been to a doctor, maybe even had a biopsy? You hadn't, had you?"

"I was afraid," she admitted. She looked at him. "My mother died of it—and my aunt—and my sister had a radical mastectomy. I couldn't bear it. And when you—"

"When I told you what you already knew and what you never wanted to hear—you couldn't take it. You blacked right out, you know. Fainted away. And it had nothing to do with the seventy-odd thousand volts of static you were carrying. I caught you." He put out his arms where they were, on display, until she looked at them and saw the angry red scorch marks on his forearms and heavy biceps, as much of them as she could see from under his short-sleeved shirt. "About nine-tenths knocked me out too," he said. "But at least you didn't crack your head or anything."

"Thank you," she said reflexively and then began to cry. "What am I going to do?"

"Do? Go back home, wherever that is—pick up your life again, whatever that might mean."

"But you said—"

"When are you going to get it into your head that what I did was not a diagnostic?"

"Are you—did you—you mean you cured it?"

"I mean you're curing it right now. I explained it all to you before. You remember that now, don't you?"

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"Not altogether but—yes." Surreptitiously (but not enough, because he saw her) she felt under the sheet for the lump. "It's still there."

"If I bopped you over the head with a bat," he said with slightly exaggerated simplicity, "there would be a lump on it. It would be there tomorrow and the next day. The day after that it might be smaller. In a week you'd still be able to feel it but it would be gone. Same thing here."

At last she let the enormity of it touch her. "A one-shot cure for cancer—"

"Oh, God," he said harshly. "I can tell by looking at you that I am going to have to listen to that speech again. Well, I won't."

STARTLED, she asked "What speech?"

"The one about my duty to humanity. It comes in two phases and many textures. Phase one has to do with my duty to humanity and really means we could make a classic buck with it. Phase two deals solely with my duty to humanity and I don't hear that one very often. Phase two utterly overlooks the reluctance humanity has to accept good things unless they arrive from accepted and respectable sources. Phase one is fully aware of this but gets rat shrewd in figuring ways around it."

She said, "I don't—" but could get no farther.

"The textures," he overrode her, "are accompanied by the light of revelation, with or without religion and/or mysticism. Or they are cast sternly in the ethical-philosophy mold and aim to force me to surrender through guilt mixed—to some degree all the way up to total —with compassion."

"But I only—"

"You," he said, aiming a long index finger at her, "have robbed yourself of the choicest example of everything I have just said. If my assumptions had been right and you had gone to your friendly local sawbones—and he had diagnosed cancer and referred you to a specialist and he had done likewise and sent you to a colleague for consultation and, in random panic, you had fallen into my hands and been cured—and had gone back to your various doctors to report a miracle, do you know what you'd have gotten from them? 'Spontaneous remission,' that's what you'd have gotten. And it wouldn't be only doctors," he went on with a sudden renewal of passion, under which she quailed in her bed. "Everybody has his own commercial. Your nutritionist would have nodded over his wheat germ or his macrobiotic rice cakes, your priest would have dropped to his knees and looked at the sky, your geneticist would have a pet theory about generation-skipping and would assure you that your grandparents probably had spontaneous

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remissions, too, and never knew it."

"Please!" she cried but he shouted at her.

"Do you know what I am? I am an engineer twice over, mechanical and electrical—and I have a law degree. If you were foolish enough to tell anyone about what has happened here (which I hope you aren't—but if you are I know how to protect myself) I could be jailed for practicing medicine without a license. You could have me up for assault because I stuck a needle into you and even for kidnaping if you could prove I carried you in here from the lab. Nobody would give a damn that I had cured your cancer. You don't know who I am, do you?"

"No. I don't even know your name."

"And I won't tell you. I don't know your name either—"

"Oh! It's—"

"Don't tell me! Don't tell me! I don't want to hear it. I wanted to be involved with your lump and I was. I want it and you to be gone as soon as you're both up to it. Have I made myself absolutely clear?"

"Just let me get dressed," she said tightly, "and I'll leave right now."

"Without making a speech?"

"Without making a speech." And in a flash her anger turned to misery and she added: "I was going to say I was grateful. Would that have been all right, sir!"

And his anger underwent a change too, for he came close to the bed and sat down on his heel, bringing their faces to a level, and said quite gently, "That would be fine. Although—you won't really be grateful for another ten days, when you get your 'spontaneous remission' reports—or maybe for six months or a year or two or five, when examinations keep on testing out negative."

She detected such a wealth of sadness behind this that she found herself reaching for the hand with which he steadied himself against the edge of the bed. He did not recoil but he didn't seem to welcome her touch either.

"Why can't I be grateful right now?"

"That would be an act of faith," he said bitterly, "and that just doesn't happen any more—if it ever did." He rose and went toward the door. "Please don't go tonight," he said. "It's dark and you don't know the way. I'll see you in the morning."

When he came back in the morning the door was open. The bed was made and the sheets were folded neatly on the chair, together with the pillow slips and the towels she had used. She wasn't there.

HE CAME out into the entrance court and contemplated his bonsai.

Early sun gold-frosted the hori-

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zontal upper foliage of the old tree and brought its gnarled limbs into sharp relief, tough brown-gray creviced in velvet. Only the companion of a bonsai (there are owners of bonsai but they are a lesser breed) fully understands the relationship. There is an exclusive and individual treeness to the tree because it is a living thing and living things change—and there are definite ways in which the tree desires to change. A man sees the tree and in his mind makes certain extensions and extrapolations of what he sees and sets about making them happen. The tree in turn will do only what a tree can do, will resist to the death any attempt to do what it cannot do or to do it in less time than it needs. The shaping of a bonsai is therefore always a compromise and always a cooperation. A man cannot create bonsai, nor can a tree. It takes both and they must understand one another. It takes a long time to do that. One memorizes one's bonsai, every twig, the angle of every crevice and needle and, lying awake at night or in a pause a thousand miles away, one recalls this or that line or mass, one makes one's plans. With wire and water and light, with tilting and with the planting of water-robbing weeds or heavy, root-shading ground cover, one explains to the tree what one wants. And if the explanation is well enough made and there is great enough understanding the tree will respond and obey—almost.

Always there will be its own self-respecting, highly individual variation: *Very well, I shall do what you want, but I will do it my way.* And for these variations the tree is always willing to present a clear and logical explanation and, more often than not (almost smiling), it will make clear to the man that he could have avoided it if his understanding had been better.

It is the slowest sculpture in the world, and there is, at times, doubt as to which is being sculpted, man or tree.

So he stood for perhaps ten minutes, watching the flow of gold over the upper branches, and then went to a carved wooden chest, opened it, shook out a length of disreputable cotton duck. He opened the hinged glass at one side of the atrium and spread the canvas over the roots and all the earth to one side of the trunk, leaving the rest open to wind and water. Perhaps in a while—a month or two—a certain shoot in the topmost branch would take the hint and the uneven flow of moisture up through the cambium layer would nudge it away from that upward reach and persuade it to continue the horizontal passage. And perhaps not—and it would need the harsher language of binding and wire. But then it might have something to say, too, about the rightness of an upward trend and

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would perhaps say it persuasively enough to convince the man—altogether, a patient, meaningful, and rewarding dialogue.

"Good morning."

"Oh, goddam!" he barked. "You made me bite my tongue. I thought you'd gone."

"I had." She kneeled in the shadows, her back against the inner wall, facing the atrium. "But then I stopped to be with the tree for a while."

"Then what?"

"I thought a lot."

"What about?"

"You."

"Did you now?"

"Look," she said firmly. "I'm not going to any doctor to get this thing checked out. I didn't want to leave until I had told you that and until I was sure you believed me."

"Come on in and we'll get something to eat."

Foolishly, she giggled.

"I can't. My feet are asleep."

Without hesitation he scooped her up in his arms and carried her around the atrium.

She asked, her arm around his shoulders and their faces close, "Do you believe me?"

He continued around until they reached the wooden chest, then stopped and looked into her eyes.

"I believe you. I don't know why you decided as you did but I'm willing to believe you."

He set her down on the chest and stood back.

"It's that act of faith you mentioned," she said gravely. "I thought you ought to have it at least once in your life—so you can never say again what you said." She tapped her heels gingerly against the slate floor. "Ow!" She made a pained smile. "Pins and needles."

"You must have been thinking for a long time."

"Yes. Want more?"

"Sure."

"You are an angry, frightened man."

He seemed delighted.

"Tell me about all that!"

"No," she said quietly. "You tell me. I'm very serious about this. Why are you angry?

"I'm not."

"Why are you so angry?"

"I tell you I'm not. Although," he added good-naturedly, "you're pushing me in that direction."

"Well then, why?"

HE GAZED at her for what to her seemed a very long time indeed.

"You really want to know, don't you?"

She nodded.

He waved a sudden hand, up and out.

"Where do you suppose all this came from—the house, the land, the equipment?"

She waited.

"An exhaust system," he said, with a thickening of his voice she

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was coming to know. "A way of guiding exhaust gases out of internal combustion engines in such a way that they are given a spin. Unburned solids are embedded in the walls of the muffler in a glass-wool liner that slips out in one piece and can be replaced by a clean one every couple of thousand miles. The rest of the exhaust is fired by its own spark plug and what will burn, burns. The heat is used to preheat the fuel. The rest is spun again through a five-thousand mile cartridge. What finally gets out is, by today's standards at least, pretty clean. And because of the preheating it actually gets better mileage out of the engine."

"So you've made a lot of money."

"I made a lot of money," he echoed. "But not because the thing is being used to cut down air pollution. I got the money because an automobile company bought it and buried it in a vault. They don't like it because it costs something to install in new cars. Some friends of theirs in the refining business don't like it because it gets high performance out of crude fuels. Well, all right—I didn't know any better and I won't make the same mistake again. But yes—I'm angry. I was angry when I was a kid on a tankship and we were set to washing down a bulkhead with chipped brown soap and canvas. I went ashore and bought a detergent and tried it and it was better, faster and cheaper, so I took it to the bos'n, who gave me a punch in the mouth for pretending to know his job better than he did. Well, he was drunk at the time but the rough part came when the old shellbacks in the crew ganged up on me for being what they called a 'company man'—that's a dirty name in a ship. I just couldn't understand why people got in the way of something better.

"I've been up against that all my life. I have something in my head that just won't quit. It's a way I have of asking the next question: why is so-and-so the way it is? Why can't it be such-and-such instead? There is always another question to be asked about anything or any situation—especially you shouldn't quit when you like an answer because there's always another one after it. And we live in a world where people just don't want to ask the next question!

"I've been paid all my stomach will take for things people won't use and if I'm mad all the time it's really my fault—I admit it—because I just can't stop asking that next question and coming up with answers. There are a half-dozen real block-busters in that lab that nobody will ever see and half a hundred more in my head. But what can you do in a world where people would rather kill each other in a desert, even when they're

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shown it can turn green and bloom —where they'll fall all over themselves to pour billions into developing a new oil strike when it's been proved over and over again that the fossil fuels will kill us all?

"Yes, I'm angry. Shouldn't I be?"

She let the echoes of his voice swirl around the court and out through the hole in the top of the atrium and waited a little longer to let him know he was here with her and not beside himself and his fury. He grinned at her sheepishly when he came to this.

And she said, "Maybe you're asking the next question instead of asking the right question. I think people who live by wise old sayings are trying not to think—but I know one worth paying some attention to. It's this: If you ask a question the right way, you've just given the answer." She paused to see if he was paying real attention. He was. She went on, "I mean, if you put your hand on a hot stove you might ask yourself, how can I stop my hand from burning? And the answer is pretty clear, isn't it? If the world keeps rejecting what you have to give—there's some way of asking why that contains the answer."

"It's a simple answer," he said shortly. "People are stupid."

"That isn't the answer and you know it," she said.

"What is?"

"Oh, I can't tell you that! All I know is that the way you do something, where people are concerned, is more important than what you do. If you want results. I mean—you already know how to get what you want with the tree, don't you?"

"I'll be damned."

"People are living, growing things, too. I don't know a hundredth part of what you do about bonsai but I do know this—when you start one, it isn't often the strong straight healthy ones you take. It's the twisted sick ones that can be made the most beautiful. When you get to shaping humanity, you might remember that."

"Of all the—I don't know whether to laugh in your face or punch you right in the mouth!"

She rose. He hadn't realized she was quite this tall.

"I'd better go."

"Come on now. You know a figure of speech when you hear one."

"Oh, I didn't feel threatened. But—I'd better go, all the same."

Shrewdly he asked her, "Are you afraid to ask the next question?"

"Terrified."

"Ask it anyway."

"No."

"Then I'll do it for you. You said I was angry—and afraid. You want to know what I'm afraid of."

"Yes."

"You. I am scared to death of you."

"Are you really?"

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"You have a way of provoking honesty," he said with some difficulty. "I'll say what I know you're thinking: I'm afraid of any close human relationship. I'm afraid of something I can't take apart with a screwdriver or a mass spectroscope or a table of cosines and tangents. I don't know how to handle it."

His voice was jocular but his hands were shaking.

"You do it by watering one side," she said softly, "or by turning it just so in the sun. You handle it as if it were a living thing, like a species or a woman or a bonsai. It will be what you want it to be if you let it be itself and take the time and the care."

"I think," he said, "that you are making me some kind of offer. Why?"

"Sitting there most of the night," she said, "I had a crazy kind of image. Do you think two sick twisted trees ever made bonsai out of one another?"

"What's your name?" he asked her.

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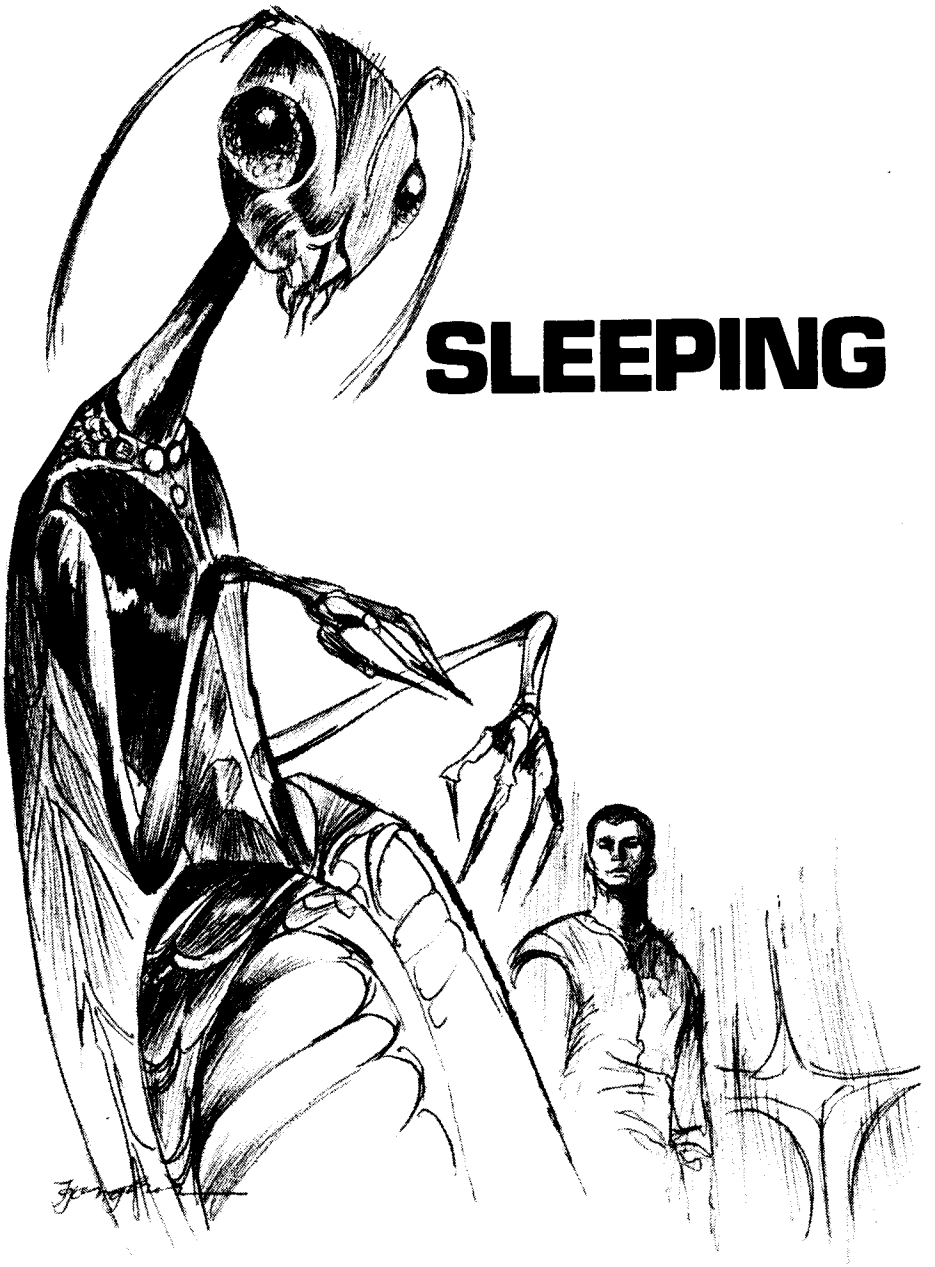

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A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

BEAUTY

She was young and beautiful and demanding—demanding a love Grimes could never give!

COMMODORE DAMIEN, Officer Commanding Couriers, was not in a very good mood. This was not unusual—especially on the occasions when Lieutenant Grimes, captain of the Serpent Class Courier *Adder*, happened to be on the carpet.

"Mr. Grimes—" said the commodore in a tired voice.

"Sir."

"Mr. Grimes, you've been and gone and done it again."

The lieutenant's prominent ears reddened.

"I did what I could to save my ship and my people, sir."

"You destroyed an expensive piece of equipment and played merry hell with the Federation's colonial policy. My masters—who, incidentally, are also your masters—are not, repeat not, amused."

"I saved my ship," Grimes reiterated stubbornly.

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The commodore looked down at the report on his desk. A grim smile did little, if anything, to soften the harsh planes of his bony face.

"It says here that your ship saved you."

"She did," admitted Grimes. "It was a sort of mutual—"

"And it was your ship that killed —I suppose that 'kill' is the right word to use regarding a highly intelligent robot—Mr. Adam. H'm, a slightly extenuating circumstance. Nonetheless, Grimes, were it not for the fact that you're a better than average spaceman you'd be O-U-bloody-T, trying to get a job as third mate in Rim Runners or some such outfit." He made a steeple of his skeletal fingers, glared coldly at the lieutenant over the bony erection. "So, in the interests of all concerned, I've decided that your *Adder* will not be carrying any more passengers for a while—at least, not with you in command of her. Even so, I'm afraid that you'll not have much time to enjoy the social life—such as it is—of base."

Grimes sighed audibly. Although a certain Dr. Margaret Lazenby was his senior in rank he was beginning to get on well with her.

"As soon as repairs and routine maintenance are completed, Mr. Grimes, you will get the hell off this planet."

"What about my officers, sir? Mr. Beadle is overdue for leave."

"My heart fair bleeds for him."

"And Mr. McCloud is in the hospital."

"Ensign Vitelli, your new engineering officer, was ordered to report to your vessel as soon as possible, if not before. The work of fitting a replacement computer to *Adder* is already well in hand." The commodore looked at his watch. "It is now fourteen-thirty-five. At eighteen hundred hours you will lift ship."

"My orders, sir—"

"Oh, yes, Grimes. Your orders. A matter of minor importance, actually. As long as you get out of my hair that's all that matters to me. But I suppose I have to put you in the picture. The Shaara are passing through a phase of being nice to humans and we of the Federation are reciprocating. There's a small parcel of extremely important cargo to be lifted from Droomoor to Brooum and for some reason or other our arthropodal allies haven't a fast ship of their own handy. Lindisfarne Base is only a week from Droomoor by Serpent Class Courier. So—"

So Viper, Asp *and* Cobra *have all been in port for weeks but I get the job . . .*

Grimes did not utter the thought but the commodore had his telepathic moments. He smiled again, this time with a touch of sympathy.

He said, "I want you off Lind-

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isfarne, young Mr. Grimes, before there's too much of a stink raised over this Mr. Adam affair. You're too honest. I can bend the truth better than you can."

"Thank you, sir," said Grimes, meaning it.

"Off you go, now. Don't forget these." Grimes took the heavily sealed envelope. "And try not to make too much of a balls of this assignment."

"I'll try, sir."

Grimes saluted, marched smartly out of the commodore's office, strode across the apron to where his flying darning needle, not yet shifted to a lay-up berth, was awaiting him.

MR. BEADLE met him at the airlock. He rarely smiled—but he did so rather smugly when he saw the orders in Grimes' hand.

He asked casually, "Any word of my relief, Captain?"

"Yes. You're not getting it, Number One," Grimes told him, rather hating himself for the pleasure he derived from being the bearer of bad tidings. "And we're to lift off at eighteen hundred hours. Is the new engineer aboard yet?"

Beadle's face had resumed its normal lugubrious cast.

"Yes," he said. "But stores, Captain—repairs—maintenance—"

"Are they in hand?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then if we aren't ready for space it will be our own fault."

But Grimes knew—and it made him feel as unhappy as his first lieutenant looked—that the ship would be ready.

ADDER lifted precisely on time. Grimes, sulking hard—he had not been able to see Maggie Lazenby—did not resort to his customary spectacular getting-upstairs-in-a-hurry technique, kept his fingers off the auxiliary reaction drive controls. The ship drifted up and out under inertial drive only, seemingly sharing the reluctance to depart of her officers. Beadle slumped gloomily in his chair; von Tannenbaum, the navigator, stared at his instruments with an elaborate lack of interest, Slovotny, the electronic communications officer, snarled every time that he had occasion to hold converse with Aerospace Control.

And yet, once the vessel was clear of the atmosphere, Grimes began to feel almost happy.

Growl you may but go you must. . .

He was on his way. He was back in what he regarded as his natural element. Quite cheerfully he went through the motions of lining *Adder* up on the target star, was pleased to note that von Tannenbaum was cooperating in his usual highly efficient manner. And then, trajectory set, the Mann-

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chenn Drive was put into operation and the little ship was falling at a fantastic speed through the warped continuum, with yet another mission to be accomplished.

The captain made the usual minor ritual of lighting his pipe.

He said, "Normal deep space routine, Number One."

"Normal deep space routine, sir."

"Who has the watch?"

"Mr. von Tannenbaum, Captain."

"Good. Then come to see me as soon as you're free."

When Beadle knocked at his door Grimes had the envelope of instructions open. He motioned the first lieutenant to a chair.

"Fix us drinks, Number One, while I see what's in this—" He extended a hand for the glass the officer put into it, sipped pink gin, continued reading. "Well, we're bound for Droomoor, as you know."

"As well I know." Beadle then muttered something about communistic bumblebees.

"Come, come, Mr. Beadle. The Shaara are our brave allies. And they aren't at all bad when you get to know them."

"I don't want to get to know them. If I couldn't have my leave at least I could have been sent to a world with real human girls and a few bright lights—"

"Mr. Beadle, you shock me. By your xenophobia as well as by your low tastes. However, as I was saying, we are to proceed to Droomoor at maximum velocity consistent with safety. There we are to pick up a small parcel of very important cargo, the loading of which is to be strictly supervised by the local authorities. As soon as possible thereafter we are to proceed to Brooum at maximum velocity."

"Just delivery boys," grumbled Beadle. "That's us."

"Oh, well," Grimes told him philosophically, "it's a change from being coach drivers. And after the trouble we've had with passengers of late it should be a welcome one."

•

DROOMOOR is an Earth-type planet featuring the usual seas, continents, polar icecaps and all the rest of it. Evolution did not produce any life forms deviating to any marked degree from the standard pattern—neither did it come up with any fire-making, tool-using animals. If human beings had been the first to discover it, it would have become a Terran colony. But a Shaara ship had made the first landing, so it was colonized by the Shaara, as was Brooum, a very similar world.

Grimes brought *Adder* in to Port Sherr with his usual competence, receiving the usual cooperation from the Shaara version of Aerospace Control. Other matters were not so usual. He and his of-

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ficers were interested to note that the aerial traffic they sighted during their passage through the atmosphere consisted of semi-rigid airships rather than heavier-than-air machines. And the buildings surrounding the landing apron at the spaceport were featureless, mud-colored domes rather than angular constructions of glass and metal. Beadle mumbled something about a huddle of bloody beehives but Grimes paid no attention. As a reasonably efficient captain he was interested in the layout of the port, was trying to form some idea of what facilities were available. A ship is a ship is a ship, no matter by whom built or by whom manned—but a mammal is a mammal, an arthropod is an arthropod. And each has its own separate requirements.

"The port officials seem on their way out to us," remarked von Tannenbaum.

A party of Shaara had emerged from a circular opening near the top of the closer dome. They flew slowly toward the ship, their gauzy wings almost invisible in the sunlight. Grimes focused his binoculars on them. In the lead was a princess, larger than the others, her body more slender, glittering with the jeweled insignia of her rank. She was followed by two drones, so hung about with precious stones and metal that it was a wonder that they were able to stay airborne. Four workers, less gaudily caparisoned than the drones but with sufficient ornamentation to differentiate them from the common herd, completed the party.

"Number One," said Grimes, "attend the airlock, please. I shall receive the boarding party in my day cabin."

He went down from the control room to his quarters, got out the whisky. Three bottles, he decided, should be sufficient, although the Shaara drones were notorious for their capacity.

THE princess was hard, businesslike. She refused to take a drink herself and under her glittering, many-faceted eyes the workers dared not accept Grimes' hospitality. Even the drones limited themselves to a single small glass apiece. She stood there like a gleaming, metallic piece of abstract statuary, motionless, and the voice that issued from the box strapped to her thorax was that of a machine rather than of a living being.

She said, "This is an important mission, Captain. You will come with me at once to the Queen Mother for instructions."

Grimes did not like being ordered around, especially aboard his own ship. But he was well aware that it is foolish to antagonize planetary rulers.

"Certainly, Your Highness. But first I must give instructions to

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my officers. And before I can do so I must have some information. To begin with, how long a stay do we have on your world?"

"You will lift ship as soon as the consignment has been loaded." She consulted the jeweled watch she wore strapped to a forelimb. "The underworkers will be on their way out to your vessel now." She pointed toward the four upper caste working Shaara. "These will supervise stowage. Please inform your officers of the arrangements."

Grimes called Beadle on the intercom, asked him to the cabin, told him to place himself at the disposal of the supervisors and to ensure that *Adder* was in readiness for instant departure. He then went to his bedroom to change into a dress uniform, was pulling off his shirt when he realized that the princess had followed him.

"What are you doing?" she asked coldly.

"Putting on something more suitable, Your Highness."

"That will not be necessary, Captain. You will be the only human in the presence of Her Majesty and everybody will know who and what you are."

Resignedly Grimes shrugged back into his uniform shirt, unadorned save for the shoulder boards. He felt that he should be allowed to make more of a showing, especially among beings all dressed up like Christmas trees—but his orders had been to cooperate fully with the Shaara authorities. And shorts and shirt were far more comfortable than long trousers, frock coat, collar and tie, fore-and-aft hat and that ridiculous ceremonial sword.

He hung his personal communicator over his shoulder, put on his cap and said, "I'm ready, Your Highness."

"What is that?" she asked suspiciously. "A weapon?"

"No, Your Highness. A radio transceiver. I must remain in touch with my ship at all times."

"I suppose it's all right," she said grudgingly.

II

WHEN Grimes walked down the ramp, following the princess and her escorting drones, he saw that a wheeled truck had drawn up alongside *Adder* and that a winch mounted on the vehicle was reeling in a small airship, a bloated gasbag from which was slung a flimsy car, at the after end of which a huge, two-bladed propeller was still lazily turning. Workers were scurrying about on the ground and buzzing between the blimp and the truck.

"Your cargo," said the princess. "And your transport from the spaceport to the palace."

The car of the airship was now only a foot above the winch. From it the workers lifted carefully a

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white cylinder—apparently made of some plastic—about four feet long and one foot in diameter. Set into its smooth surface were dials and an indicator light that glowed vividly green even in the bright sunlight. An insulated lead ran from it to the airship's engine compartment where, thought Grimes, there must be either a battery or a generator. Yes, a battery it was. Two workers, their wings a shimmering transparency, brought it out and set it down on the concrete beside the cylinder.

"You will embark," the princess stated.

Grimes stood back and assessed the situation. It would be easy enough to get on to the truck, to clamber on top of the winch and from there into the car—but it would be impossible to do so without getting his white shorts, shirt and stockings filthy. Insofar as machinery was concerned the Shaara believed in lubrication and plenty of it.

"I am waiting," said the princess.

"Yes, Your Highness, but—"

Grimes did not hear the order given—the Shaara communicated among themselves telepathically—so was somewhat taken aback when two of the workers approached him, buzzing loudly. He flinched when their claws penetrated the thin fabric of his clothing and scratched his skin. He managed to refrain from crying out when he was lifted from the ground, carried the short distance to the airship and dumped, sprawling, on to the deck of the open car. The main hurt was to his dignity. Looking up at his own vessel he could see the grinning faces of von Tannenbaum and Slovotny at the control room viewports.

He scrambled somehow to his feet, wondering if the fragile decking would stand his weight. And then the princess was with him, as were the escorting drones, and the upper caste worker in command of the blimp had taken her place at the simple controls. Next the frail contraption was ballooning swiftly upward. Grimes, looking down, saw the end of the anchor cable whip off the winch barrel. He wondered what would happen if the dangling wire fouled something on the ground below, then decided it was none of his business. These people had been playing around with airships for quite some years and must know what they were about.

The princess was not in a communicative mood and obviously the drones and the workers talked only when talked to—by her—although all of them wore voice boxes. Grimes was quite content with the way things were. He had decided that the Shaaran was a bossy female and he did not like bossy females, mammalian, arthropodal or whatever. He settled down to enjoy the trip, appreciat-

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ing the leisurely—by his standards—flight over the lush countryside. There were the green, rolling hills, the great banks of flowering shrubs, huge splashes of color that were vivid without being gaudy. Thousands of workers were busily employed about the enormous blossoms. He saw almost no machinery. In a culture such as this there would be little need for machines, workers of the lower grades being no more than flesh-and-blood robots.

Ahead loomed the city.

Just a huddle of domes it was, some large, some small, with the greatest of all of them roughly in the center. This one, Grimes saw as they approached it, had a flattened top, and here he saw machinery—a winch, he decided.

The airship came in high, lost altitude slowly, finally hovering over the palace, its propeller barely turning over to keep it stemming the light breeze. Two workers flew up from the platform, caught the end of the dangling cable, snapped it on to the end of another cable brought up from the winch drum. The winch was started and the blimp was drawn down. A set of wheeled steps was pushed into position, its upper part hooked on to the gunwale of the swaying car. The princess and her escort ignored this facility, fluttering out and down in a flurry of gauzy wings. Grimes used the ladder, of course, feeling grateful that somebody had bothered to remember that he was wingless biped.

"Follow me," snapped the princess.

Grimes followed her through a circular hatch in the platform. The ramp down which she led him was steep and he had difficulty maintaining his balance, was unable to gain more than a confused impression of the interior of the huge building. There was plenty of light, luckily, a green-blue radiance emanating from clusters of luminescent insects hanging at intervals from the roof of the corridor. The air was warm and bore an acrid but not unpleasant tang. It carried very few sounds, however, only a continuous, faintly sinister rustling noise. Grimes missed the murmur of machinery. Surely—apart from anything else—a vast structure such as this would need mechanical ventilation. In any case, there was an appreciable air flow. And then, at a junction of four corridors, he saw a group of workers, their feet hooked into rings set in the smooth floor, their wings beating slowly, maintaining the circulation of the atmosphere.

Down Grimes and the princess went, down through corridors that were deserted save for themselves, through other corridors that were busy streets crowded with workers scurrying on mysterious errands. But the lower caste

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Shaara always gave the princess and her party a respectfully wide berth. Only an occasional drone would stop to stare at the Earthman with interest.

The party came at last to the end of a long passageway, closed off by a grilled door, the first that Grimes had seen in the hive. On the far side of it were six workers, hung about with metal accoutrements. Workers? No, Grimes decided: soldiers, Amazons. Did they, he wondered, have stings, as did their Terran counterparts? Perhaps they did—but the laser pistols they held would be far more effective.

"Who comes?" asked one of them in the sort of voice that Grimes associated with sergeant-majors.

"The Princess Shrrla, with Drones Brrynn and Drryhr, and Earth-Drone-Captain Grrimes."

"Enter, Princess Shrrla. Enter, Earth-Drone-Captain Grrimes."

The grille slid silently aside, admitting Grimes and the princess, shutting again, leaving the two drones on its further side. Two soldiers led the way along a tunnel that, by the Earthman's standards, was very poorly illuminated; two more brought up the rear. Grimes was pleased to note that the princess seemed to have lost most of her arrogance.

THE tunnel led to a vast chamber, a blue-lit dimness about which the shapes of the Queen-Mother's attendants rustled, scurried and crept. Slowly they walked over the smooth, soft floor —under Grimes' shoes it felt unpleasantly organic—to the raised platform on which lay a huge, pale shape. Ranged around the platform were screens upon which moved pictures of scenes from all over the planet—one showed the spaceport, *Adder* standing tall and slim and gleaming on the apron. Banks of dials and meters evidently controlled the screens. Throne-room this enormous vault was—and nursery and the control room of a world.

Grimes looked with pity at the flabby, grossly distended body with its ineffectual limbs, its useless stubs of wings. He did not, oddly enough, consider obscene the slowly moving belt that ran under the platform, upon which, at regular intervals, a glistening, pearly egg was deposited, neither was he repelled by the spectacle of the worker whose swollen body visibly shrank as she regurgitated nutriment into the mouth of the Shaara Queen—but he was taken aback when that being spoke to him while feeding was still in progress. He should not have been, knowing as he did that the artificial voice boxes worn by the Shaara have no connection with their organs of ingestion.

"Welcome, Captain Grimes," she said in deep, almost masculine

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tones. Her voice was truly regal.

"I am honored, Your Majesty," he stammered.

"You do us a great service, Captain Grimes."

"That is a pleasure as well as an honor, Your Majesty."

"So—but, Captain Grimes, I must, as you Earthmen say, put you in the picture." A short silence ensued. "On Brooum exists crisis. Disease—a virus, a mutated virus has taken its toll among the hives. A cure was found too late. The Brooum Queen Mother is dead. All princesses not beyond fertilization age are dead. Even the royal eggs, larvae and pupae were destroyed by the disease. We, of course, are best able to afford help to our daughters and sisters on Brooum. We offered to send a fertilizable princess to become Queen Mother—but the Council of Princesses which now rules the colony insists that its new monarch be born, as it were, on the planet. We are dispatching—by your vessel—a royal pupa. She will tear the silken sheath and emerge, as an imago, into the world over which she will reign."

Grimes grunted absentmindedly, added hastily: "Your Majesty."

The Queen Mother turned her attention to the television screens.

"If we are not mistaken," she said, "the loading of the refrigerated canister containing the pupa has been completed. Princess Shrrla will take you back to your ship. You will lift and proceed as soon as is practicable." Again she paused, then went on. "We need not tell you, Captain Grimes, that we Shaara have great respect for Terran spacemen. We are confident that you will carry out your mission successfully. We shall be pleased, on your return to our planet, to confer upon you the Order of the Golden Honeyflower. On your bicycle, spaceman!"

Grimes looked at the recumbent Queen dubiously. Where had she picked up that expression? But he had heard it said—and was inclined to agree—that the Shaara were more human than many of the humanoids throughout the Galaxy.

He bowed low—then, following the princess, escorted by the soldiers, made his way out of the throne-room.

IT IS just three weeks, Terran Standard, from Droomoor to Brooum as the Serpent Class Courier flies. That, of course, is assuming that all systems are go aboard the said Courier. All systems were not go insofar as *Adder* was concerned. This was the result of an unfortunate combination of circumstances. The ship had been fitted with a new computer at Lindisfarne Base. A new engineering officer—all of whose previous experience had been as a junior in a Constellation

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Class Cruiser—had been appointed to her and she had not been allowed to stay in port long enough for any real maintenance to be carried out.

The trouble started one evening, ship's time, when Grimes was discussing matters with Spooky Deane, the psionic communications officer. The telepath was, as usual, getting outside a large, undiluted gin. His captain was sipping a glass of the same fluid but with ice cubes and bitters as additives.

"Well, Spooky," said Grimes, "I don't think that we shall have any trouble with this passenger. She stays in her cocoons—the home-grown one and the plastic outer casing—safe and snug and hard-frozen. Thawing her out will be up to her loyal subjects. By that time we shall be well on our way—"

"She's alive, you know," said Deane.

"Of course she's alive."

"She's conscious, I mean. I'm getting more and more attuned to her thoughts, her feelings. It's always been said that it's practically impossible for there to be any real contact of minds between human and Shaara telepaths—but when you're cooped up in the same ship with a Shaara, a little ship at that—"

"Tell me more," ordered Grimes.

"It's—fascinating. You know, of course, that race memory plays a big part in the Shaara culture. The princess, when she emerges as an imago, will know exactly what her duties are and what the duties of those about her are. She knows that her two main functions will be to rule and to breed. Workers exist only to serve her and every drone is a potential father to her people."

"And is she aware of *us*?"

"Dimly, Captain. She doesn't know, of course, who or what we are. As far as she's concerned we're just some of her subjects in close attendance upon her."

"Drones or workers?"

Spooky Deane laughed.

"If she were more fully conscious she'd be rather confused on that point. Males are drones—and drones don't work."

Grimes was about to make some unkind remarks about his officers when the lights flickered. When they flickered a second time he was already on his feet. When they went out he was halfway through the door of his day cabin and hurrying toward the control room. The police lights came on, fed from the emergency batteries—but the sudden cessation of the noise of pumps and fans and the cutting off in mid-beat of the irregular throbbing of the inertial drive were frightening. The thin, high whine of the Mannschenn Drive Unit deepened as the spinning, precessing gyroscopes slowed

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to a halt and, as they did so, there came the nauseating dizziness of temporal disorientation.

Grimes kept going, although—as he put it later—he did not know if it was Christmas Day or last Thursday. The ship was in free fall now. He pulled himself rapidly along the guide rail, was practically swimming in air as he dived through the hatch into Control.

Von Tannenbaum had the watch. He was busy at the auxiliary machinery control panel. A fan restarted somewhere but a warning buzzer began to sound. The navigator cursed. The fan motor slowed down and the buzzer ceased.

"What's happened, Pilot?" demanded Grimes.

"The Phoenix jennie I think, Captain. Vitelli hasn't reported yet—"

Then the engineer's shrill, excited voice sounded from the intercom speaker: "Auxiliary engineroom to Control. I have to report a leakage of deuterium."

"What pressure is left in the tank?" Grimes asked.

"The gauges still show twenty thousand units. But—"

"But what?" Grimes snapped.

"Captain—the tank is empty."

Grimes pulled himself to his chair, strapped himself in. He looked out through the viewports at the star-gemmed blackness, each point of light hard and sharp, no longer distorted by the temporal precession fields of the Drive, each a distant sun lifetimes away. He turned to face his officers—Beadle, looking no more glum than usual; von Tannenbaum, whose normally ruddy face was now as pale as his hair; Slovotny, whose dark complexion now had a greenish cast; Deane, ectoplasmic as always. They were joined by Vitelli, an ordinary-looking young man who was, at the moment, more than ordinarily frightened.

"Mr. Vitelli," Grimes asked, "is the leakage into our atmosphere or outside the hull?"

"Outside, sir."

"Good. In that case—" Grimes made a major production of filling and lighting his battered pipe. "Now I can think. Luckily I've not used any reaction mass this trip, so we have ample fuel for the emergency generator. Got your slipstick ready, Pilot? Assuming that the tanks are full, do we have enough to run the inertial and interstellar drives from here to Brooum?"

"I'll have to use the computer, Captain."

"Then use it. Meanwhile—Sparks and Spooky, can either of you gentlemen tell me what ships are in the vicinity?"

"The Dog Star Line's *Basset,*" Slovotny told him.

"The cruiser *Draconis*," added Deane.

Grimes felt it would be humiliating for a Courier Service Captain to have to call for help—but

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Draconis would be the lesser of two evils.

He said, "Get in touch with both vessels, Mr. Deane. I'm not sure that we can spare power for the Carlotti, Mr. Slovotny. Get in touch with both vessels, ask their positions and tell them ours. But don't tell them anything else."

"Our position, sir, is—what?"

Grimes swiveled so that he could see the chart tank.

He rattled off the coordinates, adding: "Near enough, until we get an accurate fix."

"I can take one now, Captain," von Tannenbaum told him.

"Thank you, Pilot. Finished your sums?"

"Yes." The navigator's beefy face was expressionless. "To begin with, we have enough chemical fuel to maintain all essential services for a period of seventy-three Standard days. But we do not have enough fuel to carry us to Brooum, even using Mannschenn Drive only. We could, however, make for ZX1797—Sol-type, with one Earth-type planet, habitable but currently uninhabited by intelligent life forms."

Grimes considered the situation. It he were going to call for help he would be better off staying where he was, in reasonable comfort and, for a while, safety.

"Mr. Vitelli," he said, "you can start up the emergency generator. Mr. Deane, as soon as Mr. von Tannenbaum has a fix you can get a message out to *Basset* and *Draconis* . . ."

"But she's properly awake," Deane muttered. "She's torn open the silk cocoon and the outer canister is opening—"

"What the hell are you talking about?" barked Grimes.

"The princess. When the power went off the refrigeration unit stopped. She—" The telepath's face assumed an expression of rapt devotion. "We must go to her—"

"We must go to her," echoed Vitelli.

"The emergency generator," Grimes almost yelled. But he, too, could feel that command inside his brain, the imperious demand for attention—for love. Here at last was something, someone he could serve with all the devotion of which he was—of which he ever would be capable. And yet a last, tattered shred of sanity persisted.

He said gently, "We must start the emergency generator. She must not be cold or hungry."

Beadle agreed. "We must start it—for her."

They started the emergency generator and the ship came back to life—of a sort. She was a small bubble of light and warmth and life drifting down and through the black immensities.

III

THE worst part of it all, Grimes said later, was knowing what

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was happening but not having the will power to do anything about it. Not being able to fight for, or even want, a different fate.

"But it was educational. You can't deny that. I always used to wonder how the Establishment gets away with so much. Now I know. If you're a member of the Establishment you have that inborn—arrogance? No, not arrogance. That's not the right word. You have the calm certainty that everybody will do just what you want. With our Establishment it could be largely the result of training, of education. With the Shaara Establishment no education or training is necessary. Too, the princess had it easy—almost as easy as she would have had if she had broken out of her cocoon in the proper place at the proper time. She was in a little ship manned by junior officers, people used to saluting and obeying officers with more gold braid on their sleeves. For her to impose her will was child's play. Literally child's play in this case. There was a communication problem, of course, but it wasn't a serious one. Even if she couldn't actually speak telepathically to the rest of us—there was Spooky Deane. With him she could dot the *i*'s and cross the *t*'s. And she did."

Adder's officers gathered in the cargo compartment that was now the throne-room. A table had been set up, covered with a cloth that was, in actuality, a new Federation ensign from the ship's flag locker. To it the princess—the queen, rather—clung with her four posterior legs. She was a beautiful creature, slim, the colors of her body undimmed by age. She was a glittering, bejeweled piece of abstract statuary but she was alive. With her great faceted eyes she regarded the men who hovered about her. She was demanding something. Grimes knew, as all of them did. She was demanding something—quietly at first, then more and more insistently.

But what?

Veneration? Worship?

"She hungers," stated Deane.

She hungers . . .

Grimes's memory was still functioning. He tried to recall what he knew of the Shaara.

He said, "Tell her that her needs will be satisfied."

Reluctantly, yet willingly, he left the cargo compartment, making his way to the galley. It did not take him long to find what he wanted, a squeeze bottle of syrup. He hurried back with it.

It did not occur to him to hand the container to the queen. With his feet in contact with the deck he was able to stand before her, holding the bottle in his two hands, squeezing out the viscous fluid, drop by drop, into the wait-mouth.

Normally he would have found that complexity of moving parts

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rather frightening, repulsive even—now they seemed to possess an essential rightness that was altogether lacking from the clumsy masticatory apparatus of a human being. Slowly, carefully he squeezed, until a voice spoke in his mind.

Enough, enough . . .

"She would rest now," said Deane.

"She shall rest," stated Grimes.

He led the way from the cargo compartment to the little wardroom.

IN A bigger ship with a larger crew—with a senior officer in command who, by virtue of his rank, was himself a member of the Establishment—the spell might soon have been broken. But this was only a little vessel, and of her personnel only Grimes was potentially a rebel. The time would come when this potentiality would be realized—just as, later, the time of compromise would come—but it was not yet. He had been trained to obedience.

In the wardroom the officers disposed of a meal of sorts. When it was over Grimes, from force of habit, pulled his pipe from his pocket, began to fill it.

Deane admonished him, saying, "She wouldn't like it. It taints the air."

"Of course," agreed Grimes, putting his pipe away.

They sat in uneasy, guilty silence. They should have been working. There was so much to be done about the Hive. Von Tannenbaum at last unbuckled himself from his chair and, finding a soft rag, began unnecessarily to polish a bulkhead. Vitelli muttered something about cleaning up the engineroom and drifted away. Slovotny, saying that he wanted to help, followed Vitelli. Beadle took the dirty plates into the pantry—normally he washed the dishes just before the next meal.

"She is hungry," announced Deane.

Grimes went to the galley for another bottle of syrup.

So it went on day after day, with the Queen gaining strength and, if it were possible, even greater authority over her subjects. And she was learning. Deane's mind was open to her and it was through Deane that she could speak.

"She knows," said the telepath, "that supplies in the Hive are limited, that sooner or later, sooner rather than later, we shall be without heat, without air or food. She knows that there is a planet within reach. She orders us to proceed there, so that a greater Hive may be established on its surface."

"Then let us proceed," agreed Grimes.

He knew, as they all knew, that a general distress call would bring help—but somehow he was in-

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capable of ordering it made. He knew that the establishment of a Hive on a planet of ZX1797 would be utterly impossible—but that was what she wanted.

So *Adder* awoke from her sleeping state, vibrating to the irregular rhythm of the inertial drive and, had there been an outside observer, flickered into invisibility as the gyroscopes of the Mannschenn Drive unit precessed and tumbled, falling down and through the warped continuum, pulling the structure of the ship with them.

Ahead was ZX1797, a writhing, multi-hued spiral, expanding with every passing hour.

Von Tannenbaum now held effective command of the ship. Grimes had become the Queen's personal attendant, although it was still Deane who made her detailed wishes known. Grimes fed her, cleansed her, sat with her hour after hour in wordless communion. A part of him rebelled, a part of him screamed soundlessly and envisaged hard fists smashing those great, faceted eyes, heavy boots crashing through fragile chitin. A part of him rebelled—but was powerless and she knew it. She was female and he was male and the tensions were inevitable, and enjoyable to one if not to the other.

And then Deane said to him, "She is tiring of her tasteless food."

She would be, thought Grimes dully. And then there was the urge to placate, to please. Although he had never made a deep study of the arthropodal race he knew, as did all spacemen, which Terran luxuries were appreciated by the Shaara. He went up to his quarters, found what he was looking for. He decanted the fluid from its glass container into a squeeze bottle. Had it been intended for human consumption this would not have been necessary, now that the ship was accelerating—but Shaara queens do not, ever, feed themselves.

He went back to the throne-room. Deane and the huge arthropod watched him. The Queen's eyes were even brighter than usual. She lifted her forelimbs as though to take the bottle from Grimes, then let them fall to her side. Her gauzy wings were quivering in anticipation.

Grimes approached her slowly. He kneeled before her, holding the bottle before him. He raised it carefully, the nippled end toward the working mandibles. He squeezed and a thin, amber stream shot out. Its odor was rich and heavy in the almost still air of the compartment.

More!

The word formed itself in his mind. He went on squeezing.

But—you are not a worker. You are a drone . . .

The word "drone" denoted masculinity, not idleness.

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You are a drone. You shall be the first father of the new Hive . . .

"Candy is dandy, but liquor is quicker," muttered Deane, struggling to maintain a straight face.

Grimes glared at the telepath. What was so funny about this? He was feeling, strongly, the stirrings of desire. She was female—and in his mind's eye those flimsy wings were transparent draperies enhancing, not concealing, the symmetry of the form of a lovely woman—slim, with high, firm breasts, with long, slender legs. She wanted him to be her mate, her consort.

She wanted him.

She . . .

Suddenly the vision flickered out.

This was no woman spread in alluring, naked abandon.

This was no more than a repulsive insect sprawled in drunken untidiness, desecrating the flag that had been spread over the table. The wings were crumpled. A dull film was over the faceted eyes. A yellowish ichor oozed from among the still-working mandibles.

Grimes retched violently.

"Captain." Deane's voice was urgent. "She's out like a light. She's drunk as a fiddler's bitch—"

"And we must keep her that way," snapped Grimes. He was himself again. He strode to the nearest bulkhead pickup. "Attention, all hands. This is the Captain speaking. Shut down inertial and interstellar drive units. Energize Carlotti transceiver. Contact any and all shipping in the vicinity and request aid as soon as possible. Say that we are drifting with main engines inoperable." He turned to Deane. "I'm leaving you in charge, Spooky. If she shows signs of breaking surface you know what to do." He looked sternly at the telepath. "I suppose I can trust you."

"You can," the Psionic Communications Officer assured him. "You can. Indeed you can, Captain. I wasn't looking forward at

The Region Between . A Novella . Harlan Ellison

At this writing no one knows what the next issue of **GALAXY** will look like—we are letting it take whatever shape is necessary to contain

THE REGION BETWEEN

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all at all to ending my days as a worker in some peculiar Terran-Shaara Hive." He stared at Grimes thoughtfully. "I wonder if the union would have been fertile."

"That will do, Mr. Deane," growled Grimes.

"FANTASTIC," breathed Commodore Damien. "Fantastic. Almost, Mr. Grimes, I feel a certain envy. The things you get up to."

The aroma of good whisky hung heavily in the air of the Commodore's office. Yet Damien, while not an abstainer, was not touching the stuff. And though Grimes' tastes were catholic, on an occasion such as this he preferred to be stone cold sober.

"It is more than fantastic," said the Shaara Queen-Emissary, the special envoy of the Empress herself. Had she not been using a voice box her words would have been a snarl. "It is—disgusting. Reprehensible. This officer forced liquor down the throat of a member of our Royal family. He—"

"He twisted her arm?" suggested the commodore.

"I do not understand. But she is now Queen Mother of Brooum. A drunken, even alcoholic Queen Mother."

"I saved my ship and my people," stated Grimes woodenly.

Damien grinned unpleasantly.

"Isn't this where we came in, Lieutenant? But no matter. There are affairs of far more pressing urgency. Not only do I have to cope with a direct complaint from the personal representative of Her Imperial Majesty—"

Even though she was wearing a voice box the Queen-Emissary contrived to hiccough. And all this, Grimes knew, was going down on tape. It was unlikely that he would ever wear the ribbon of the Order of the Golden Honeyflower—but it was equally unlikely that he would be butchered to make a Shaara holiday.

"He weaned her on Scotch," persisted the Queen-Emissary.

"Aren't you, perhaps, a little jealous?" suggested Damien. He switched his attention back to Grimes. "Meanwhile, Lieutenant, I am being literally bombarded with Carlottigrams from Her not-so-Imperial Majesty on Brooum. She demands that I dispatch to her, as soon as possible if not before, the only drone in the Galaxy with whom she would dream of mating."

"No!" protested Grimes. "No!"

"Yes, Mister. Yes. For two pins I'd accede to her demands." He sighed regretfully. "But I suppose that one must draw some sort of line somewhere."

He sighed again. Then: "Get out, you drone!" he yelled wildly.

It was a pity that he had to spoil the effect by laughing.

"We are not amused," said the Shaara Queen. ★

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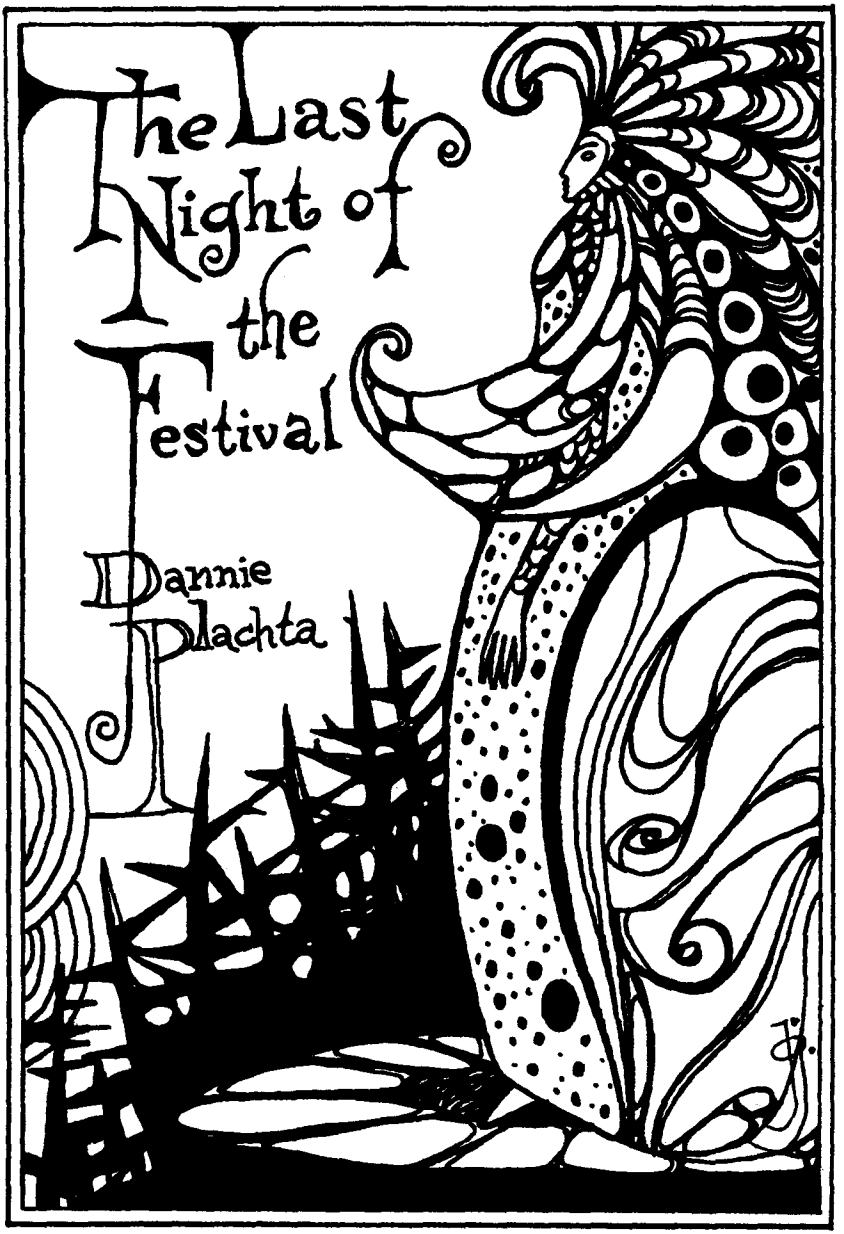

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They dangled from taut lines, small beneath the stars, barbed shadows deep upon their faces and engraved arithmetic high upon their chests. Together they swayed like October scarecrows, 1939 in their eyes.

Their heads were bent as though they might be listening, and maybe they heard the wind.

There was a wind upon the Crying Wall that whipped from stone to stone, howled for fifteen thousand years and, wearing dust, moved on . . .

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THE last moon was just up, the color of splashed blood, arching behind the closely strung confetti balls of cobalt, amber, crystal and tea, and the fountainleaf trees were already twitching in the rising Third Wind, when the first light, the softest light, the Wanting Light of the Festival, twinked on. The ghost-white candlelamp flickered and flared, moved slowly and smoothly up the Great Slanted Tower, attained the crest where it shot off tiny sparks of firefly lightning, dipped a lonely salute to the Spirits of All the Stars and was quickly and utterly lost among the Billion and One Lights of the Festival. Like a sudden thunderclap out of the Fourth Sky, the momentary ceremonial silence was shattered by a thousand electric marching bands, a hundred massive steam organs, ten mighty wind clappers and a single great tide horn, all under the masterful direction of a long silver tapeworm named Fest. Mus. 999.

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Now the slowly climbing Five Reflections of Love were trailed by the artificial moons, a thousand painted balloons swarming in a sequined formation like brilliant weaver-bolls soaring in the late wind. A billion people seethed within the glare and the blare, among the games and the contests, the shows and the fairs, the taverns and the arenas, the rides and the parades and the prizes, rollicking up boulevarded midways or holding hands down sheltered paths in picnic groves, all of them in crowds or in pairs—none of them alone—for it was the Last Night of the Festival.

A girl—or perhaps a woman—stood in the tumbling light of a meteor bush that budded with fiercely darting coals, her eyelids lightly closed, smiling a whisper into the wind.

"Did you feel your Want?"

A man—or perhaps a boy—stood in the gentle

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shadow of a thundercloud tree that stirred with falling vapor leaves, his eyelids tightly closed, sighing a whisper into the wind.

"We have all felt our Want for tonight."

When the girl opened her eyes they were all milk and black cherries, wide and deep and glazed by polished crystal. Her hair was weathered ivory, vaguely set with twisting caverns that shifted and yawned and were quietly sealed by the wind. And sometimes, when the wind was just one way or another and her head was turned just so, there were tiny glintings of tinted stones that twinkled far within delicately latticed strands, never staying very long, for the wind liked to change her hair. Once she tilted her head and the wind exposed a cloudy pink pearl streaked over with pale ivory, so that it looked something like the thing called Sunrise. Her name was Dawn.

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When the man opened his eyes they were all sand and slate-pebbles, slim and flat and shrouded by swirled smoke. His body was sculptured midnight, starkly set with gaunt outlines that were steeled in the wind. And sometimes, when the wind was just one way or another and his stance was frozen just so, there were whispered rustlings of ebony robes that flapped like tiny moth wings, never staying very long, for the wind had little to alter. Once he raised a hand and the wind swept away, whirring toward the gloomy Third Sky, so that it sounded something like the thing called Sunset. His name was Dusk.

Boldly, in the light of all the moons, Dusk stepped across the slim path of speckled silver tiles that lay like freshly minted coins and, taking Dawn by the hand, led her onto and along the tinkling metal trail, on past the alley of Fog and Mist where they kicked crackling sparks at the nebulous void. They contin-

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ued past the fragrant brazen torches of the Magic Lantern Tavern and strolled on toward the nearer end of the great oval span called the Bridge of Heady Wines.

Oktoberfest, frauleins undressed,
and castles on the Rhine . . .

AS HE held her hand lightly and yet firmly he felt the stub of her missing finger, still strangely alien to his touch, though he had known that hand, that tender abortion, most of his life. He had been there—so very long ago—when they had taken that finger. And though he hadn't looked and hadn't seen the blood and had avoided the monstrous gaping—or perhaps the horribly tight closing—of her eyes, he had heard the grating teeth of the Silver Witch Saw and the very long, very shrill, very young scream.

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Again he remembered the quiet laugh of the Silver Witch artisan, so low in pitch behind the wavering wail, so very much like the faint chuckling drone of grinding marrow. The Laughing Butcher they had called him, for it seemed he had always been in a merry mood whenever he had worked, and his working hours had been long. *The Wisdom Machine never thought of that*, murmured a portion of Dusk's mind or a shred of his soul. *Such a tiny little thing, hardly worth replacing* . . . and the blazing lights of the Festival were lost in his swirling eyes.

Guns and butter, slogans to utter,
and a finger to point the way . . .

THEY strolled, very close to each other, up the curved ramp that was the Bridge of Heady Wines, savoring the new-wine scents and the vintage-wine aromas, cherishing the windblown come-follow-your-

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nose tastes that lolled about their quivering nostrils and rolled across their titillated tongues, while their eyes constantly shifted from the spinning peppermint-stick sign poles of the wine stalls that lined the way to the giddy, sometimes gaudy, Festival grounds below.

At the very summit they paused a long pause, sharing a jeweled goblet of fine old meteor-bush wine, still holding hands, now feeling a summer-lightning sensation of quiet excitement, somehow knowing that this was the grandest night of all.

The girl waved the drained chalice, flashing it into the brilliant night like a Wisdom Day sparkler, casting its crystal fires toward the cragged outline of the Crooked Stick Tower that staggered upward to lean dizzily against the flight of all the moons. Tossing her whirlpool hair, she tugged at Dusk's hand. He nodded, robes swishing, and they fell together onto the sleek snowflake slide that spiraled

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them down from the center of the bridge and directly into Silly Street.

Dropping softly into the crowd that moved slowly toward the slim twisted building at the end of the street, Dawn and Dusk gamboled gaily through the ankle-deep rainbow mist they had entered. There they encountered the unseen minor horrors of slippery patches, squashy bogs, icy pools and reversing conveyor belts. Together they detonated three stench devices, six electric shockers and nine steam-gushers. Somehow they evaded the falling water bags at the end of the road and the pie-throwing machines never came really close to hitting them. Dawn giggled and Dusk smiled.

The couple skipped aside from the street and the crowd at the tipsy rocking-arch entrance of the Crooked Stick Tower—to rest for a moment on the softly flickering candletip grass—when they noticed in a small lonely shadow the Old Happy One. He

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lay in his ivy-draped basket of burnished bronze beside the ebony mosses of the Wanting Well Shrine, near the three broken stones that were all that remained of the ancient Crying Wall.

Dawn and Dusk walked over and looked at the thing in the basket and Dusk recalled the old tales of how the Laughing Butcher had lavished his talents upon this, the eldest of the Final Fifteen. Dusk had been young when the Silver Witch had very slowly, with deftly-gnawing slices, altered this creature that had once been a whole man. Little by little, over many days, it had been said, his limbs were shorn. And then he had had no tongue. Then his eyes and ears, too, were gone and at the very end his testicles had been placed into little matching jars of the clearest crystal.

The Laughing Butcher had—or so it had been told—grown quite sad toward the end of that, his pet project, and a few had even insisted that he had

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cried. For somehow, and no one had ever attempted to explain why, the old man had always seemed the happier of the two, never bothering to scream or shudder, but always smiling or grinning or even jesting aloud when he had still had his tongue.

As Dawn and Dusk looked down the Old Happy One turned his hairless head and smiled a toothless, tongueless smile at them. The Old Happy One could always sense the presence of others, it was claimed. Dawn and Dusk patted him gently on his scarred head and left him lying there, alone with his secret happy thoughts.

Liederhosen, gas the Chosen, and Dortmunder out of a keg . . .

"WE DIDN'T Want at the Shrine," whispered Dawn, hesitating.

"He Wanted for us," said Dusk, pulling her away and across the shimmering lawn.

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Skirting the bizarre tower with its shrieking devil-tries, they wandered through an adjacent grove of fountainleaf trees and, happening to glance upward through the cascading sheets of transparent leaves, they glimpsed a sweeping formation of electric drag-onbirds, a zee-shaped silhouette against the gleam-ing moons, streaking toward the Second Sky, trail-ing pulsing flashes of autumn hearthfire.

"Even they know it's the Last Night of the Festi-val," murmured Dawn, a wisp of her hair flicking up-on her forehead to reveal a tarnished lantern stone, her eyes even wider than usual.

Near the edge of the small forest they passed a re-clining couple who wore chameleon Wanting Masks, and each face-covering splashed into contrasting halves as Dawn and Dusk walked by.

Upon leaving the glade they encountered the bleak gurgling pool known as the Pond of Wanting Wis-dom. Dusk hopped along the phosphorescent step-

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ping stones that traversed the restless surface of swirling cross currents but Dawn took the long way around, meeting him on the other side, where he stood waiting to lead her across the glittering metal hill called the Bronze Knoll.

They were clattering over the polished mound, a vast convex sky mirror spread with rolling moons and wheeling stars, when they were dazzled by the dancing streaks of the nightly artificial meteor shower.

"I didn't realize that it was quite that late," sighed Dusk and he hurried Dawn along, pulling her toward the distant fanciful chaos of the inner Festival grounds.

When they reached the Path of Pain they removed their steel sandals and walked as softly as they could upon the shifting ashes, for there were fifteen thousand years of fifteen million tribal ancestors grinding

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beneath their knowing feet. The ribbon of gray powder led them under the crimson-stained Gate of Blood and Dawn and Dusk bowed their heads reverently as they passed through. A few steps beyond the creaking wooden arch they paused beside the Final Grotto where the preserved blood of those of the Final Fifteen—who had gone on to join the Spirits of All the Stars—trickled and flowed in a sunken rocky pool. Of the fifteen clustered Forever Lamps, twelve flickered ruby flames from thin, crackling wicks.

"The Old Happy One—and us," said Dawn very quietly, her great tender eyes studying the three well-primed needle torches, each perched in its own little niche, each so calm and dark—a stark lonely gap in the center and a lightly touching pair at the end.

The Third Wind suddenly shifted like a whirring

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whip, slashing the line of fires, one by one, yet very hastily, momentarily snuffing them into tiny embers, finally fanning them into thrashing flares that leaped toward the stars. The two unlit lamps at the end of the row tinkled together and struck a single topaz spark.

Holding hands, Dawn and Dusk lit mental Forever Lamps, felt their Final Wants and moved on.

Just down the sacred lane, they stopped at a rock-hewn table upon which rested, for anyone there to see, a great, delicately crafted silver key.

"The Key to the Wisdom Machine," said Dusk. "Beaten and forged from the Silver Witch Saw."

Again, he felt the stub of Dawn's missing finger.

Together they pondered the inscription mounted on the slab:

May you ever walk 'twixt Dawn and Dusk,
And your Wanting Well run deep.

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After a very long, very tender moment Dusk said, "Come—" and they continued along the somber path that was strangely dull and flat beneath the reeling sky.

They donned their sandals at the Twisted Gate and joined the copper-cobbled road that carried them with clicking steps into the abrupt tumult of the Great Midway.

An electric dragon bird landed at their feet with a violent flutter of gold-leaf feathers, squawked a terrible cry, flashed white-hot metal skin and fused into a squirming mass at the crossroad.

"It broke," moaned Dawn, turning away, a look of deep pity in her eyes.

"It wouldn't leave with the others," said Dusk solemnly, and he unfurled an enrobed arm around the girl's quivering shoulders to steer her into the heart of the midway throng.

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The golden goose, steppes for free use, and Christmas tea at the Palace . . .

FLOWING with the mainstream of the crowd, they rammed their way along the broad, sweeping boulevard, passing the gaily decorated Wisdom Trees lining either side. They milled about a dueling pair of electric swordsmen until the bulk of the capricious audience surged toward the Tunnel of No Return. Dawn and Dusk rebelled at that and jostled their way into a tributary channel of crushing humanity, to enter the screaming area of the Spider and the Fly.

Dawn volunteered to be a fly and Dusk helped her aboard the crystal-winged vehicle. He waved her off into the buzzing, flapping wind and buckled himself into the saddle of a brown, hairy spider that waited, throbbing, with twitching, stilted legs.

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With a shuffle-gaited patter the spider churned up the slanted starting boom, its jeweled scanner-eyes winking in intricate relays while its interior homing devices hummed with an impatient pitch. Dusk closed his eyes when the tensed monster, with a series of muffled clicks, sprang outward into space, falling, trailing a gleaming flash of quicksilver.

As the spider spun its tactical chart Dusk opened his eyes to locate Dawn. He knew precisely where to look and, when he found her flittering fly, he gave her a sweeping wave that she quickly returned. He glanced around to take in the chaotic scene, taking a mild interest in the complex maneuvers of the other aerial duels. From the very beginning of his own spider's moves, he had known in detail what its actions and its opposing fly's actions would be. His spider scurried upward and Dusk glanced down at its turgid web, seeing the long lines of metal that formed a vicious pattern. It reminded him of the

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Final Camp. There, too, there had been long lines of metal, forming the periphery that had held the Silver Witch, the Laughing Butcher, Dawn, the others of the Final Fifteen and, finally, the Final Experiment. He closed his eyes again, remembering that there had been yet other wires . . . and electrodes . . . and sophisticated pain.

Stuka flights, panzer fights, and the kids tucked away at camp . . .

A CHIME sounded above the shrieks of the Festival and of his mind and Dusk opened his eyes to see Dawn's fly at his side.

She laughed. "The spider always catches the fly."

"Unless there's a technical failure," he replied, reaching out to touch her hand before she whisked away and before his spider raced to retrieve its web.

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Back on the ground they tested their equilibrium and found it wanting when Dawn staggered into Dusk's vaguely unsteady stance. Dusk held her for a time, his robes slightly ruffled, and Dawn giggled a little in his arms, her hair lightly fluffed, until they both recovered their balance and the girl became serious enough to brush her lips against his cheek. He returned her kiss with a longer kiss upon her lips and when he opened his eyes he found a speck of coral flint in her strangely calm hair.

"Your hair is a mess."

He laughed and he led her through an exit and back onto the midway.

The crowds were more subdued now, though just as large, and Dawn and Dusk were more leisurely in their passage along the vast thoroughfare. The couple wandered with an easy cadence, routinely swinging their heads from side to side, like the

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sweeping Final Camp scanner-globes they had known before the Final Experiment. They sauntered by the dim shaft of the Cave of Many Echoes, the distant mellow chatter of the Rain on the Roof Lounge, the burbling hiss of the Fountain of Flowing Metals, where Dawn had once, very long ago, cast a garnet locket into the molten spray to feel a solemn Want, and on by their old trysting haunt, the Garden of Tender Dreams. A purring rotor-ferry spidered its way down to the Five Winds Landing Port, back from its pyramid course to the rustic Outer Inn and the eerie Never Moor. They watched a troupe of cavorting robot clowns near the pleasant din of the Great Candyrock Bell and turned to wave at a hayride party hauled by the measured trotting of an electric pony. The Lazy Lagoon was next on their right, limpid with barely rippling moons and stars, and the churning sightseeing cruiser, *Star*

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Trawler, was easing into its berth, so Dawn and Dusk skipped along to greet it.

There was much waving and cheering as the craft touched land and impatient adventurers crowded to displace the disembarking passengers.

"Look," said Dawn, pointing, as a column of electric rats scurried down a quivering mooring line, scuffling over the moonlit dock with their tiny metal claws until they were quickly lost in secret dusty shadows.

"They know," said Dusk, just as the evening's artificial Surprise Shower began to sting the wind.

The nearest shelter was the boat but the overflowing crowd barred Dawn and Dusk from seeking that refuge and they sprinted through the drizzle toward the neighboring merry-go-round. Over their shoulders they heard a mariner's shout: "Last time around—last time around!" There was a chugging

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throb and a swishing splash and Dawn and Dusk stopped, turning and looking back into the gentle rain to wave the shimmering raindrops from their faces and toward the embarking adventurers.

"The last time around," whispered Dawn.

"There wasn't room," said Dusk.

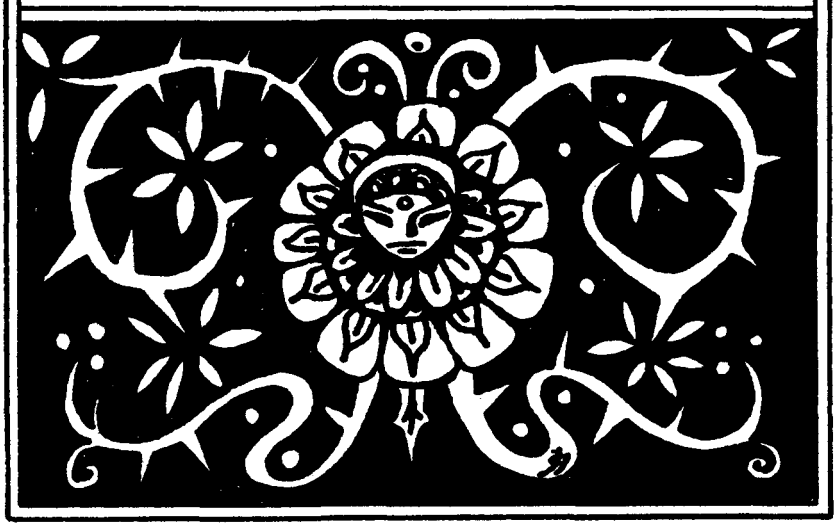
They walked hand in hand, not minding the shower, toward the tinkling whirl of the merry-go-round.

Beneath a brocaded circular awning that hung with polished leather bells they leaned against a flowered railing and watched the fun go by. They watched and remembered the older times and, quietly, they talked.

Peenemunde, church on Sunday, and a U-boat down at the pier . . .

"REMEMBER the Final Experiment?" asked Dawn.

"And how it failed," said Dusk. "And somehow,



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with the Grace of the Spirits of All the Stars, we survived."

"Sometimes when I look at something very, very beautiful or hear the wind at night I can still feel—the pain."

Dawn looked away from a prancing copper stallion with a dazzling crown on its head.

"But the Final Fifteen became mental gods and we freed ourselves and built the Wisdom Machine."

"It was to have been wise," sighed Dawn.

"Perhaps it was." Dusk noticed a sudden silence upon the awning overhead. "All of this, down to the Surprise Shower, was planned by the Wisdom Machine."

"It had but one order—to make the entire world happy forever."

"Our people had suffered so."

"After all its researches and surveys it built the Festival." Dawn plucked a pastel flower from the

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railing. "People were found happiest in a carnival spirit."

"A perpetual Festival," said Dusk. "It had to go on forever or the Machine would have failed in its task."

"It had no choice."

"There is an impeccable logic in the safeguard of the Final Solution Device." Dusk held an arm toward the merry-go-round. "Last time around?"

Dawn said, "Why not?"

Together they mounted a pink elephant that staggered as it lumbered in its arc and stopped.

An old man who had jumped from a silver tiger calmly kicked a buzzing box, smashing it.

"We have all felt our Want for tonight," murmured Dawn.

Tannenbaum, with Lebensraum, and a VW in every garage . . .

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DAWN and Dusk dashed outside and all through the Festival rides were halting and lights were going out.

Two men passed by, carrying the basket of the Old Happy One toward the Tomb of the Laughing Butcher, just down the midway.

"Is he dead?" asked Dawn.

"I don't know," replied Dusk.

There was a far, far howling, perhaps from the Fourth Sky, and it moaned high over the Festival and was gone.

A clanking robot ran down the center of the Great Midway, shouting, "Hey, Rube—hey, Rube!"

Dawn and Dusk said nothing but their eyes were on the sky.

The last moon was almost down—the color of splashed blood—arching behind the silent fountain-leaf trees. And the sighing Third Wind was already

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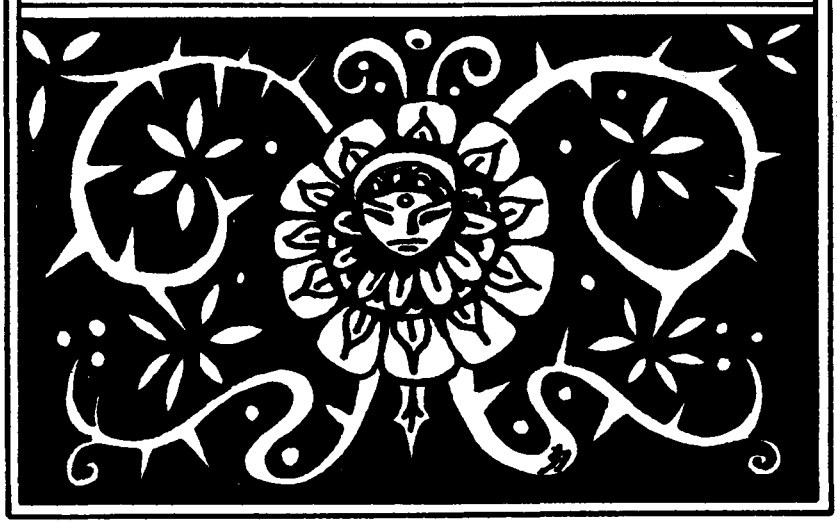
dying in the night when the clearest bell, the deepest bell, the Wisdom-hour Bell, tolled the time. Like a sudden zephyr out of the Second Sky a frantic robot raced among the crowds, hawking dark glasses at the top of its plastic lungs while somewhere a shining tapeworm of whirring silver instinctively spun a web of crackling strands. Now the artificial moons began to burst their painted sides, spreading their brilliant colors like rainbow fires across the Spirits of All the Stars. A billion people watched beneath the glare and the blare, standing in intimate pairs or forming in casual little groups, talking quietly to each other, saying, "The fireworks are lovely—" or, "Good-night—" and, "Wasn't it a grand Festival?"

And Dawn and Dusk stood side by side holding hands and it seemed to Dusk for just a fleeting moment that Dawn's whole finger was there in place of the alien stub.



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"Just like the Sunrise," murmured Dawn.

"The Sun always sets," sighed Dusk.

Dawn and Dusk turned slowly to face each other and looked very deeply into each other's eyes, as if each were giving something and each were taking something. And somehow their eyes were blending and becoming alike until their eyes were flowing silver.

An icicle music box whirled its dripping gears and tinkled, an electric cricket rolled onto its back with kicking copper legs and chirped. And deep thunder crashed in all of the Five Skies.

It was the Last Night of the Festival.

Above the swaying scarecrows, a white star suddenly flickered and grew bright. And maybe the bent heads noticed it, but there was 1939 in their eyes. ✱

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ROBERT SILVERBERG

PART II

DOWNWARD

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

EDMUND GUNDERSEN, a former sector chief on Holman's World, an Earth colony, returns to the planet as little more than a tourist after Earth has restored it to the control of its indigenes, an intelligent elephantine life form, the nildoror. The planet is now known by its native name of Belzagor.

Gundersen's return has been dictated by an inner need on his part to learn more about the intelligent species he once treated and abused as animals.

The nildoror understand and sympathize and one of them, Srin'gahar, agrees to carry Gundersen to the nearest nildor encampment, where he can apply for a travel permit.

At the encampment Gunderson meets Vol'himyor, an ancient, many-born nildor, requests permission to go to the nildoror place of rebirth, the mist country. He is

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TO THE EARTH

invited to spend some time with his hosts before permission is granted —and that night finds himself joining them in an elemental, ritualistic dance.

He is shocked to discover that in so doing is able to share himself completely with the nildoror, in effect becoming one of them.

The nildoror, however, are perfectly willing to accept him and in the morning Gundersen receives his permission and is assigned an escort to the mist country. His understanding of his hosts deepens during the ensuing journey—as does his understanding of the planet. Or at least the dangers of going native. His trail crosses that of two of the planet's leftover humans, a man and a woman, both dying, having become the hosts to one of Belzagor's more dangerous life forms.

They ask to be put out of their misery. Gundersen kills them, continues his journey to the mist country.

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IX

A WHITE wall of water seemed to descend from the sky. Nothing on Earth could match the triple plunge of the great cataract. Here Madden's River—or the Seran'-nee—dropped five hundred meters, then six hundred, then five hundred, then five hundred more, falling from ledge to ledge in its tumble toward the sea. Gundersen and the five nildoror stood at the foot of the falls, where the entire violent cascade crashed into a broad rock-flanged basin out of which the serpentine river continued its southeasterly course. The sulidor had taken his leave in the night and was proceeding northward by his own route. To Gundersen's rear behind his right shoulder, lay the coastal plain. The central plateau lay to his left. Before him, by the head of the falls, began the northern plateau, the highlands that controlled the approach to the mist country. Just as a titanic north-south rift cut the coastal plain off from the central plateau, so did another rift running east-west separate both plateau and plain from the highlands ahead.

His party began its ascent. The Shangri-la station, one of the Company's most important outposts, was invisible from below. It was set back a short way from the head of the falls. Once there had been waystations at the foot of the falls and at the head of the middle cataract but no trace of these structures remained. The jungle had swallowed them utterly in only eight years. A winding road with an infinity of switchbacks led upward.

The swaying rhythm of his mount lulled Gundersen into a doze. He held tightly to Srin'gahar's pommel-like protrusious and prayed that in his grogginess he would not fall off. Once he woke suddenly and found himself clinging only by his left hand, his body partly slung out over a sheer drop of at least two hundred meters. Another time, drowsy again, he felt cold spray and snapped to attention to see the entire cascade of the falling river rushing past him no more than a dozen meters away. The nildoror paused to eat at the head of the lowest cataract and Gundersen dashed icy water in his face to shatter his sluggishness. They went on. He had less difficulty keeping awake now—the air was thinner and the afternoon breeze was cool. They reached the head of the falls before twilight.

Shangri-la Station, seemingly unchanged, lay before him—three rectangular unequal blocks of dark shimmering plastic, a somber ziggurat rising on the western bank of the narrow gorge through which the river sped. The formal gardens of tropical plants, established by a forgotten sector chief at least forty years before, looked as though they were being carefully maintained. At each of the building's setbacks was an outdoor veranda overlooking the river and these, too, were bedecked with plants. Gundersen felt a dryness in his throat and a tightness in his loins.

He asked Srin'gahar, "How long may we stay here?"

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"How long do you wish to stay?"

"One day, two—I don't know."

"We are not yet in a great hurry," said the nildor. "My friends and I will make camp in the bush. Come to us when it is time for you to go on."

The nildoror moved slowly into the shadows. Gundersen approached the station. At the entrance to the garden he paused. The trees here were gnarled and bowed. Long feathery fronds dangled from them. Highland flora was different from that to the south, although perpetual summer ruled here even as in the true tropics behind him. Lights glimmered within the station. Everything out here seemed surprisingly orderly—the contrast with the shambles of the serpent station and the nightmare decay of the fungoid station was sharp. Not even the hotel garden was this well tended. Four neat rows of fleshy, obscene-looking, pink forest candles bordered the walkway that ran toward the building. Slender, stately globeflower trees, heavy with gigantic fruit, formed little groves to left and right. There were hullygully trees and bitterfruits—exotics here, imported from the steaming equatorial tropics—and mighty swordflower trees in full bloom, lifting their long shining stamens to the sky. Elegant glitterivy and spiceburr vines writhed along the ground but not in any random way. Gundersen took a few steps farther in and heard the soft sad sigh of a sensifrons bush, whose gentle hairy leaves coiled and shrank as he went by, opening wearily when he had gone past, shutting again when he whirled to steal a quick glance.

Two more steps and he came to a low tree whose name he could not recall, with glossy red winged leaves that took flight, breaking free of their delicate stems and soaring away; instantly their replacements began to sprout. The garden was magical. Yet there were surprises here. Beyond the glitterivy he discovered a crescent patch of tiger moss, the carnivorous ground cover native to the unfriendly central plateau. The moss had been transplanted to other parts of the planet—a patch of it was growing out of control at the seacoast hotel—but Gundersen remembered that Seena abhorred it, as she abhorred all the productions of that forbidding plateau. Worse yet, looking upward so that he could follow the path of the gracefully gliding leaves, Gundersen saw great masses of quivering jelly, streaked with blue and red neural fibers, hanging from several of the biggest trees—more carnivores, also natives of the central plateau. What were those sinister things doing in this enchanted garden?

A moment later he had a third proof that Seena's terror of the plateau had faded. Across his path ran one of the plump, thieving otterlike animals that had bedeviled them the time they had been marooned there. It halted a moment, nose twitching, cunning paws upraised, looking for something to seize. Gundersen hissed

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at it and it scuttled into the shrubbery.

Now a massive two-legged figure emerged from a shadowed corner and blocked his way. Gundersen thought at first it was a sulidor, but he realized it was merely a robot, probably a gardener.

It said resonantly, "Man, why are you here?"

"As a visitor. I'm a traveler seeking lodging for the night."

"Does the woman expect you?"

"I'm sure she doesn't. But she'll be willing to see me. Tell her Edmund Gundersen is here."

The robot scanned him carefully. "I will tell her. Remain where you are and touch nothing."

GUNDERSEN waited. The twilight deepened and one moon appeared. Some of the trees in the garden became luminous. A serpent—of the sort once used as a source of venom—slid silently across the path just in front of Gundersen and vanished. The wind shifted, stirring the trees and bringing him the faint sounds of a conversation of nildoror somewhere not far inland from the riverbank.

The robot returned and said, "The woman will see you. Follow the path and enter the station."

Gundersen went up the steps. On the porch he noticed unfamiliar-looking potted plants, scattered casually as though awaiting transplantation to the garden. Several of them waved tendrils at him or wistfully flashed lights intended to bring curious prey fatally close. He went in and, seeing no one on the ground floor, caught hold of a dangling ladder-coil and let himself be spun up to the first veranda. He observed that the station was as flawlessly maintained within as without, every surface clean and bright, the decorative murals unfaded, the artifacts from many worlds still mounted properly in their niches. This station had always been a showplace but he was surprised to see it so attractive in these years of the decay of Earth's presence on Belzagor.

"Seena?" he called.

He found her alone on the veranda, leaning over the rail. By the light of two moons he saw the deep cleft of her buttocks and thought she had chosen to greet him in the nude. But as she turned toward him he realized that a strange garment covered the front of her body. It was a pale, gelatinous sprawl, shapeless, purple-tinged, with the texture and sheen that he imagined an immense amoeba might have. The central mass of it embraced her belly and loins, leaving her hips and haunches bare. Her left breast also was bare but one broad pseudopod extended upward over the right one. The stuff was translucent, and Gundersen plainly could see the red eye of her covered nipple, and the narrow socket of her navel. It was also alive to some degree, for it began to flow, apparently of its own will, sending out slow new strands that encircled her left

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thigh and, gradually, her right hip.

The eeriness of this clinging garment left him taken aback. Except for it, she appeared to be the Seena of old. She had gained some weight and her breasts were heavier, her hips broader. She was a handsome woman in the last bloom of youth. But the Seena of old would never have allowed such a bizarreness to touch her skin.

She regarded him steadily. Her lustrous black hair tumbled to her shoulders, as in the past. Her face was unlined. She faced him squarely and without shame, her feet firmly planted, her arms at ease, her head held high.

"I thought you were never coming back here, Edmund," she said. Her voice had deepened, indicating some inner deepening as well. When he had last known her she had tended to speak too quickly, nervously pitching her tone too high. Now, calm and perfectly poised, she spoke with the resonance of a fine cello. "Why are you back?"

"It's a long story, Seena. I can't even understand all of it myself. May I stay here tonight?"

"Of course. How needless to ask!"

"You look so good, Seena. Somehow I expected—after eight years—"

"A hag?"

"Well, not exactly." His eyes met hers and he was shaken abruptly by the rigidity he found in her fixed and inflexible gaze—its beadiness reminded him terrifyingly of the expression in the eyes of Dykstra and his woman at the last jungle station. "I don't know what I expected," he said.

"Won't you kiss me?" she asked.

"I understand you're a married woman."

She winced and tightened one fist. The thing she was wearing reacted also, deepening in color and shooting a pseudopod up to encircle, though not to conceal, her bare breast.

"Where did you hear that?"

"At the coast. Van Beneker told me you married Jeff Kurtz."

"Yes. Not long after you left, as a matter of fact."

"I see. Is he here?"

She ignored his question. "Don't you want to kiss me? Or do you have a policy about kissing other men's wives?"

HE FORCED a laugh. Awkwardly, self-consciously, he reached for her, taking her lightly by the shoulders and drawing her toward him. She was a tall woman. He inclined his head, trying to put his lips to hers without having any part of his body come in contact with the amoeba. She pulled back before the kiss.

"What are you afraid of?" she asked.

"What you're wearing makes me nervous."

"The slider?"

"If that's what it's called."

"It's what the sulidoror call it," Seena said. "It comes from the central plateau. It clings to one of the big mammals there and lives by metabolizing perspiration. Isn't it splendid?"

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"I thought you hated the plateau."

"Oh, that was a long time ago. I've been there many times. I brought the slider back on the last trip. It's as much of a pet as it is something to wear. Look."

She touched it lightly and it went through a series of color changes, expanding as it approached the blue end of the spectrum, contracting toward the red. At its greatest extension it formed a complete tunic covering Seena from throat to thighs. Gundersen became aware of something dark and pulsing at the heart of it, resting just above her loins, hiding the public triangle—its nerve-center, perhaps.

"Why do you dislike it?" she asked. "Here. Put your hand on it."

He made no move. She took his hand in hers and touched it to her side; he felt the slider's cool dry surface and was surprised that it was not slimy. Easily Seena moved his hand upward until it came to the heavy globe of a breast and instantly the slider contracted, leaving the firm warm flesh bare to his fingers. He cupped it a moment and, uneasy, withdrew his hand.

Her nipple had hardened—her nostrils had flared.

He said, "The slider's very interesting. But I don't like it on you."

She pouted.

"Very well." She touched herself at the base of her belly, just above the organism's core. It shrank inward and flowed down

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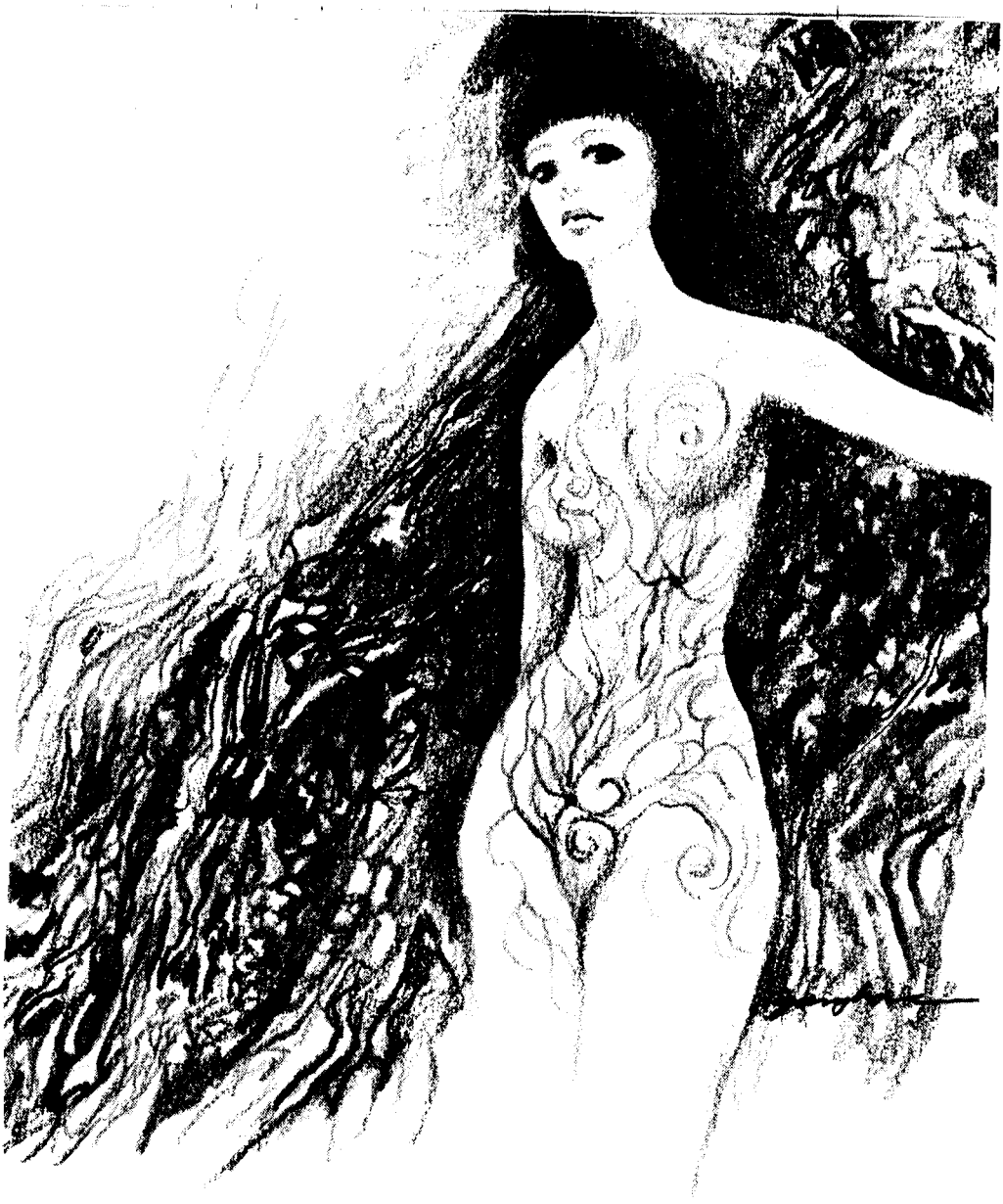

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her leg in one swift, rippling movement, gliding away and collecting itself at the far side of the veranda. "Is that better?" Seena queried, naked now, sweat-shiny, moist-lipped.

The coarseness of her approach startled him. Neither he nor she had ever worried much about nudity but there was a deliberate sexual aggressiveness about this kind of self-display that seemed out of keeping with what he regarded as her character. They were old friends, yes. They had been lovers for several years. They had been married in all but the name for many months of that time—but even so the ambiguity of their parting should have destroyed whatever intimacy had once existed. And leaving the question of her marriage to Kurtz out of it, the fact that they had not seen one another for eight years seemed to him to dictate the necessity of a more gradual return to physical closeness. He felt that by making herself pantingly available to him within minutes of his unexpected arrival she was committing a breach not of morals but of esthetics.

"Put something on," he said quietly. "And not the slider. I can't have a serious conversation with you while you're waving all those jiggling temptations in my face."

"Poor conventional Edmund. All right. Have you had dinner?"

"No."

"I'll have it served out here. And drinks. I'll be right back."

SHE entered the building. The slider remained behind on the veranda; it rolled tentatively toward Gundersen, as though offering to climb up and be worn by him for a while, but he glared at it and enough feeling got through to make the plateau creature move hurriedly away. A moment later a robot emerged, bearing a tray on which two golden cocktails sat. It offered one drink to Gundersen, set the other on the railing and noiselessly departed.

Seena returned, chastely clad in a soft gray shift that descended from her shoulders to her shins.

"Better?" she asked.

"For now."

They touched glasses. She smiled. They put their drinks to their lips.

"What's it like, living up here?" he asked.

"Serene. I never imagined that my life could be so calm. I read a good deal. I help the robots tend the garden. Occasionally there are guests—sometimes I travel. Weeks often go by without my seeing another human being."

"What about your husband?"

"Weeks often go by without my seeing another human being," she repeated.

"You're alone here? You and the robots?"

"Quite alone."

"But the other Company people must come here fairly frequently."

"Some do. There aren't many of us left now," Seena said. "Less than a hundred, I imagine. About six at the Sea of Dust. Van Ben-

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eker down by the hotel. Four or five at the old rift station. And so on—little islands of Earthmen widely scattered. There's a sort of a social circuit but it's a sparse one."

"Is this what you wanted when you chose to stay here?"

"I didn't know what I wanted, except that I wanted to stay. But I'd do it again. Knowing everything I know, I'd do it just the same way."

He said, "At the station just south of here, below the falls, I saw Harold Dykstra—"

"Henry Dykstra."

"Henry. And a woman I didn't know."

"Pauleen Mazor. She was one of the customs girls in the time of the Company. Henry and Pauleen are my closest neighbors, I guess. But I haven't seen them in years. I never go south of the falls any more and they haven't come here."

"They're dead, Seena."

"Oh?"

"It was like stepping into a nightmare. A sulidor led me to them. The station was a wreck—mold and fungoids everywhere—and something was hatching inside them, the larvae of some kind of basket-shaped red sponge that hung on a wall and dripped black oil—"

"Things like that happen," Seena said, not sounding disturbed. "Sooner or later this planet catches everyone, though always in a different way."

"Dykstra was unconscious and the woman was begging to be put out of her misery, so you see—"

"You said they were dead."

"Not when I got there. I told the sulidor to kill them. There was no hope of saving them. He split them open and then I used my torch on them."

"We had to do that for Gio' Salamone, too," Seena said. "He was staying at Fire Point and went out into the Sea of Dust and got some kind of crystalline parasite into a cut. When Kurtz and Ced Cullen found him he was all cubes and prisms, outcroppings of the most beautiful iridescent minerals breaking through his skin everywhere. And he was still alive. For a while. Another drink?"

"Please. Yes."

She summoned the robot. The night was quite dark now. A third moon had appeared.

In a low voice Seena said, "I'm so happy you came tonight, Edmund. It was such a wonderful surprise."

"Kurtz isn't here now?"

"No," she said. "He's away and I don't know when he'll be back."

"How has it been for him, living here?"

"I think he's been quite happy, generally speaking. Of course, he's a very strange man."

"He is," Gundersen said.

"He's got a quality of saint-hood about him, I think."

"He would have been a dark and chilling saint, Seena."

"Some saints are. They don't all have to be St. Francis of Assisi."

"Is cruelty one of the desirable

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traits of a saint?"

"Kurtz saw cruelty as a dynamic force. He made himself an artist of cruelty."

"So did the Marquis de Sade. Nobody's canonized him."

"You know what I mean," she said. "You once spoke of Kurtz to me and you called him a fallen angel. That's exactly right. I saw him out among the nildoror—dancing with hundreds of them—and they came to him and practically worshipped him. There he was, talking to them, caressing them. And yet also doing the most destructive things to them as well, but they loved it."

"What kind of destructive things?"

"They don't matter. I doubt that you'd approve. He—gave them drugs, sometimes."

"The serpent venom?"

"Sometimes."

"Where is he now? Out playing with the nildoror?"

"He's been ill for a while."

THE robot now was serving dinner. Gundersen frowned at the strange vegetables on his plate.

"They're perfectly safe," Seena said. "I grow them myself, in back. I'm quite the farmer."

"I don't remember any of these."

"They're from the plateau."

Gundersen shook his head. "When I think of how disgusted you were by the plateau, how strange and frightening it seemed to you that time we had to crash-land there—"

"I was a child then. When was it—eleven years ago? Soon after I met you. I was only twenty years old. But on Belzagor you must defeat what frightens you or you will be defeated. I went back to the plateau. Again and again. It ceased to be strange to me and so it ceased to frighten me—and so I came to love it. And brought many of its plants and animals back here to live with me. It's so very different from the rest of Belzagor—cut off from everything else, almost alien."

"You went there with Kurtz?"

"Sometimes. And sometimes with Ced Cullen. And most often alone."

"Cullen," Gundersen said. "Do you see him often?"

"Oh, yes. He and Kurtz and I have been a kind of triumvirate. Cullen's my other husband—almost."

"Where is Cullen now?" he asked, looking intently into her harsh and glossy eyes.

Her expression darkened.

"In the north. The mist country."

"What's he doing there?"

"Why don't you go ask him?" she suggested.

"I'd like to do just that," Gundersen said. "I'm on my way up mist country, actually, and this is just a sentimental stop on the way. I'm traveling with five nildoror going for rebirth. They're camped in the bush out there somewhere."

She opened a flask of a musky gray-green wine and gave him some.

"Why do you want to go to the

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mist country?" she asked tautly.

"Curiosity. The same motive that sent Cullen up there, I guess."

"I don't think his motive was curiosity."

"Will you amplify that?"

"I'd rather not," she said.

The conversation lapsed into silence. Talking to her led only in circles, he thought. This new serenity of hers could be maddening. She told him only what she cared to tell him, playing with him, seemingly relishing the touch of her sweet contralto voice on the night air, communicating no information at all. This was not a Seena he had ever known. The girl he had loved had been resilient and strong, not crafty or secretive—there had been an innocence about her that she seemed to have totally lost now. Kurtz might not be the only fallen angel on this planet.

He said suddenly, "The fourth moon has risen."

"Yes. Of course. Is that so amazing?"

"One rarely sees four even in this latitude."

"It happens at least ten times a year. Why waste your awe? In a little while the fifth one will be up and—"

Gundersen gasped. "Is that what tonight is?"

"The Night of Five Moons, yes."

"No one told me."

"Perhaps you never asked."

"Twice I missed it because I was at Fire Point. One year I was at sea and once I was in the southern mist country, the time the copter went down. And so on and on. I managed to see it only once, Seena, right here, ten years ago, with you. When things were at their best for us. And now, to come in by accident and have it happen—"

"I thought you had arranged to be here deliberately. To commemorate that other time."

"No. Pure coincidence."

"Happy coincidence, then."

"When does it rise?"

"In perhaps an hour."

He watched the four bright dots swimming through the sky. So much time had gone by that he had forgotten where the fifth moon should be coming from. Its orbit was retrograde. It was the most brilliant of the moons, too, with a high-albedo surface of ice, smooth as a mirror.

Seena filled his glass again. They had finished eating.

"Excuse me," she said. "I'll be back soon."

ALONE, he studied the sky and tried to comprehend this strangely altered Seena, this mysterious woman whose body had grown more voluptuous and whose soul, it seemed, had turned to stone. He saw now that the stone had been in her all along—at their breakup, for example, when he had put in for transfer to Earth and she had absolutely refused to leave Holman's World. *I love you*, she had said, *and I'll always love you but this is where I stay.* Why? Why? *Because I want to stay,* she had told him.

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And she had stayed; and he had been just as stubborn and had left without her. They had slept together on the beach beneath the hotel on his last night, so that he had boarded the ship that took him away with the warmth of her body still on his skin. She loved him and he loved her but they had broken apart, for he saw no future on this world and she saw all her future on it. And she had married Kurtz. And she had explored the unknown plateau. And she spoke in a rich, deep, new voice and let alien amoebas clasp her loins and she shrugged at the news that two nearby Earth people had died a horrible death. Was she still Seena or some subtle counterfeit?

Nildoror sounds drifted out of the darkness. Gundersen heard another sound, too, closer by, a kind of stifled, snorting grunt that was wholly unfamiliar to him. It seemed like a cry of pain, though perhaps that was his imagination. Probably it was one of Seena's plateau beasts, snuffling around, searching for tasty roots in the garden. He heard it twice more and then not again.

Time went by and Seena did not return.

Then he saw the fifth moon float placidly into the sky, the size of a large silver coin and so bright that it dazzled the eye. About it the other four danced, two of them mere tiny dots, two slightly more imposing, and the shadows of the moonslight shattered and shattered again as planes of brilliance intersected. The heavens poured light upon the land in icy cascades. He gripped the rail of the veranda and silently begged the moons to hold their pattern. But the moons shifted. He knew that in another hour two of them would be gone and the magic would ebb. Where was Seena?

"Edmund?" she said, from behind him.

She was bare again and once more the slider was on her body, covering her loins, sending a long thin projection up to encompass only the nipple of each ripe breast. The light of the five moons made her tawny skin glitter and shine. Now she did not seem coarse to him—nor overly aggressive. She was perfect in her nudity and the moment was perfect and, unhesitatingly, he went to her. Quickly he dropped his clothing. He put his hands to her hips, touching the slider, and the strange creature understood, flowing obediently from her body, a chastity belt faithless to its task. She leaned toward him, her breasts swaying like fleshy bells and he kissed her, here, here, there, and they sank to the veranda floor, to the cold smooth stone.

Her eyes remained open and colder than the floor, colder than the shifting light of the moons, even at the moment when he physically reasserted his love to her.

But nothing was cold about her embrace. Their bodies thrashed and tangled. Her skin was soft and her kiss hungry. And the years rolled away until it was the old time again, the happy time. At

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the highest moment he was dimly aware of that strange grunting sound once more. He clasped her fiercely and let his eyes close.

Afterward they lay side by side, wordless in the moonslight until the brilliant fifth moon had completed its voyage across the sky and the Night of the Five Moons had become as any other night.

X

HE slept by himself in one of the guest rooms on the top level of the station. Awakening unexpectedly early, he watched the sunrise coming over the gorge and went down to walk through the gardens, which still were glistening with dew. He strolled as far as the edge of the river, looking for his nildoror companions. They were not to be seen. For a long time he stood beside the river watching the irresistible downward sweep of that immense volume of water.

He went back finally to the station. A robot met him on the first veranda and offered him breakfast.

"I'll wait for the woman," Gundersen said.

"She will not appear until much later in the morning."

"That's odd. She never used to sleep that much."

"She is with the man," the robot volunteered. "She stays with him and comforts him at this hour."

"What man?"

"The man Kurtz, her husband."

Gundersen said, amazed, "Kurtz is here at the station?"

"He lies ill in his room."

She said he was away somewhere. She didn't know when he'd be coming back.

Gundersen said, "Was he in his room last night?"

"He was."

"How long has he been back from his last journey away from here?"

"One year at the solstice," the robot said. "Perhaps you should consult the woman on these matters. She will be with you after a while. Shall I bring breakfast?"

"Yes," Gundersen said.

But Seena was not long in arriving. Ten minutes after he had finished the juices, fruits and fried fish that the robot had brought him she appeared on the veranda, wearing a filmy white wrap. She seemed to have slept well. Her skin was clear and glowing. Her stride was vigorous. Her dark hair streamed buoyantly in the morning breeze. But the curiously rigid and haunted expression of her eyes was unchanged.

He said, "The robot told me not to wait breakfast for you. It said you wouldn't be down for a long while."

"That's all right. I'm not usually down this early, it's true. Come for a swim?"

"In the river?"

"No, silly." She stripped away her wrap and ran down the steps into the garden. He sat frozen a moment, caught up in the rhythms of her swinging arms, her jouncing buttocks—then he fol-

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lowed her. At a twist in the path that he had not noticed before she turned to the left and halted at a circular pool that appeared to have been punched out of the living rock on the river's flank. As he reached it she launched herself in a fine, arching dive and appeared to hang suspended a moment, floating above the dark water, her breasts drawn into a startling roundness by gravity's pull. Then she went under. Before she came up for breath, Gundersen was naked and in the pool beside her. Even in the mild climate the water was bitterly cold.

"It comes from an underground spring," she told him. "Isn't it wonderful? Like a rite of purification."

A gray tendril rose from the water behind her, tipped with rubbery claws. Gundersen could find no words to warn her. He pointed with short stabbing motions of two fingers and made hollow chittering noises of horror. A second tendril spiraled out of the depths and hovered over her. Smiling, Seena turned, and seemed to fondle some large creature; there was a thrashing in the water and then the tendrils slipped out of view.

"What was that?"

"The monster of the pool," she said. "Ced Cullen brought it for me as a birthday present two years ago. It's a plateau medusa. They live in lakes and sting things."

"How big is it?"

"Oh, the size of a big octopus, I'd say. Very affectionate. I wanted Ced to catch me a mate for it but he didn't get around to it before he went north. I suppose I'll have to do it myself before long. The monster's lonely." She pulled herself out of the pool and sprawled out on a slab of smooth black rock to dry in the sun. Gundersen followed her. From this side of the pool, with the light penetrating the water at just the right angle, he was able to see a massive many-limbed shape far below. Seena's birthday present.

He said, "Can you tell me where I can find Ced now?"

"In the mist country."

"I know. That's a big place. Any particular part?"

SHE rolled over onto her back and flexed her knees. Sunlight made prisms of the droplets of water on her breasts.

After a long silence she said, "Why do you want to find him so badly?"

"I'm making a sentimental journey to see old friends. Ced and I were once very close. Isn't that reason enough for me to go looking for him?"

"It's no reason to betray him, is it?"

He stared at her. The fiercely frozen eyes now were closed—the heavy mounds of her breasts rose and fell slowly, serenely.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked.

"Didn't the nildoror put you up to going after him?"

"What kind of crazy talk is that?" he blurted, not sounding

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convincingly indignant even to himself.

"Why must you pretend?" she said, still speaking from within that impregnable core of total assurance. "The nildoror want him brought back from there. By treaty they're prevented from going up there and getting him themselves. The sulidoror don't feel like extraditing him. Certainly none of the Earthmen living on this planet will fetch him. Now, as an outsider you need nildoror permission to enter the mist country and since you're a stickler for the rules you probably applied for such permission. And there's no special reason why the nildoror should grant favors to you unless you agree to do something for them in return. Q.E.D?"

"Who told you all this?"

"Believe me, I worked it all out for myself."

He propped his head on his hand and reached out admiringly with the other hand to touch her thigh. Her skin was dry and warm, now. He let his hand rest lightly—and then not so lightly—on the firm flesh. Seena showed no reaction.

Softly he asked, "Is it too late for us to make a treaty?"

"What kind?"

"A non-aggression pact. We've been fencing since I got here. Let's end the hostilities. I've been hiding things from you and you've been hiding things from me—and what good is it? Why can't we simply help one another? We're two human beings on a world that's much stranger and more dangerous than most people suspect. If we can't supply a little mutual aid and comfort, what are the ties of humanity worth?"

She spoke quietly.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world,
which seems
To lie before us like a land of
dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new.

The words of the old poem flowed up from the well of his memory. His voice cut in.

Hath really neither joy, nor
love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor
help for pain;
And we are here as on a dark-
ling plain
Swept with confused alarms of
struggle and flight
Where—where. . . .

Where ignorant armies clash
by night.

She finished it for him.

"Yes. How like you it is, Edmund, to fumble your lines just at the crucial moment, just at the final climax."

"Then there's to be no non-aggression pact?"

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that." She turned toward him, took his hand from her thigh, pressed it tenderly between her breasts, raised it to brush her lips against it. "All right, we've been playing little games. They're over and now we'll speak only truth. But you go first. Did the nildoror ask you to bring Ced out of the mist country?"

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"Yes," Gundersen said. "It was the condition of my entry."

"And you promised you'd do it?"

"I made certain reservations and qualifications, Seena. If he won't go willingly I'm not bound by honor to force him. But I do have to find him. That much I've pledged. So I ask you again to tell me where I should look."

"I don't know," she said. "I have no idea."

"Is this the truth?"

"The truth," she said and for a moment the harshness was gone from her eyes.

"Can you tell me at least why he fled—why they want him so eagerly."

SHE said, "About a year ago, he went down into the central plateau on one of his regular collecting trips. He was planning to get me another medusa, he said. Most of the time I went with him into the plateau but this time Kurtz was ill and I had to stay behind. Ced went to a part of the plateau we had never visited before. He found a group of nildoror taking part in some kind of religious ceremony. He stumbled right into them and evidently he profaned the ritual."

"Rebirth?" Gundersen asked.

"No, they do rebirth only in the mist country. This was something else, something almost as serious, it seems. The nildoror were furious. Ced barely escaped alive. He came back here and said he was in great trouble—that the nildoror wanted him, that he had committed some sort of sacrilege and had to take sanctuary. Then he went north, with a posse of nildoror chasing him right to the border. I haven't heard anything since. And that's all I can tell you."

"You haven't told me what sort of sacrilege he committed," Gundersen pointed out.

"I don't know it. I don't know what kind of ritual it was, or what he did to interrupt it. I've told you only as much as he told me. Will you believe that?"

"I'll believe it," he said. He smiled. "Now let's play another game and this time I'll take the lead. Last night you told me that Kurtz was off on a trip, that you hadn't seen him for a long time and didn't know when he'd be back. You also said he'd been sick—but you brushed over that pretty quickly. This morning the robot who brought me breakfast said that you'd be late coming down because Kurtz was ill and you were with him in his room, as you were every morning at this time. Robots don't ordinarily lie."

"The robot wasn't lying. I was."

"Why?"

"To shield Kurtz from you," Seena said. "He's in bad shape and I don't want him to be disturbed. And I knew that if I told you he was here, you'd want to see him. He isn't strong enough for visitors. It was an innocent lie, Edmund."

"What's wrong with him?"

"We aren't sure. You know, there isn't much medical service left on this planet. I suppose I could describe his disease as a kind of cancer. Only cancer isn't what he has."

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"Can you describe the symptoms?"

"What's the use? His body began to change. He became something strange and ugly and frightening and you don't need to know the details. If you thought that what had happened to Dykstra and Pauleen was horrible—you'd be rocked to your roots by Kurtz. But I won't let you see him. It's as much to shield you from him as the other way around. You'll be better off not seeing him." Seena sat up cross-legged on the rock and began to untangle the wet, snarled strands of her hair. Gundersen thought he had never seen her looking as beautiful as she looked right at this moment, clothed only in alien sunlight, her flesh taut and ripe and glowing, her body supple, full-blown, mature. And the stony fierceness of her eyes, the one jarring discordancy? Had that come from viewing, each morning, the horror that Kurtz now was? She added after a long while: "Kurtz is being punished for his sins."

"Do you really believe that?"

"I do," she said. "I believe that there are such things as sins and that there is retribution for sin."

"And that an old man with a white beard is up there in the sky, keeping score on everyone, running the show, tallying up an adultery here, a lie there, a spot of gluttony, a little pride?"

"I have no idea who runs the show," said Seena. "I'm not even sure that anyone does. Don't mislead yourself, Edmund—I'm not trying to import medieval theology to Belzagor. I won't give you the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost and say that all over the universe certain fundamental principles hold true. I simply say that here on Belzagor we live in the presence of certain moral absolutes, native to this planet. And if a stranger comes to Belzagor and transgresses against those absolutes he'll regret it. This world is not ours, never was, never will be, and we who live here are in a constant state of peril, because we don't understand the basic rules."

"What sins did Kurtz commit?"

"It would take me all morning to name them," she said. "Some were sins against the nildoror and some were sins against his own spirit."

"We all committed sins against the nildoror," Gundersen said.

"In a sense, yes. We were proud and foolish and we failed to see them for what they were—and we used them unkindly. That's a sin, yes—a sin that our ancestors committed all over Earth long before we went into space. But Kurtz had a greater capacity for sin than the rest of us because he was a greater man. Angels have farther to fall—once they fall."

"What did Kurtz do to the nildoror? Kill them? Dissect them? Whip them?"

"Those are sins against their bodies," said Seena. "He did worse."

"Tell me."

"Do you know what used to go on at the serpent station, south of the spaceport?"

"I was there for a few weeks

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with Kurtz and Salamone," Gundersen said. "Long ago—when I was very new here, when you were still a child on Earth. I watched the two of them call serpents out of the jungle, milk the raw venom from them and give the venom to nildoror to drink. And drink the venom themselves."

"And what happened then?"

HE SHOOK his head and confessed, "I've never been able to understand it. When I tried it with them, I had the illusion that the three of us were turning into nildoror. And that three nildoror had turned into us. I had a trunk, four legs, tusks, spines. Everything looked different—I was seeing through nildoror eyes. Then it ended and I was in my own body again. I felt a terrible rush of guilt, of shame. I had no way of knowing whether it had been a real bodily metamorphosis or just hallucination."

"It was hallucination," Seena told him. "The venom opened your mind, your soul, and enabled you to enter the nildor consciousness, at the same time that the nildor was entering yours. For a little while that nildor thought he was Edmund Gundersen. Such a dream is great ecstasy to a nildor."

"Is this Kurtz' sin, then? To give ecstasy to nildoror?"

"The serpent venom," Seena said, "is also used in the rebirth ceremony. What you and Kurtz and Salamone were doing down there in the jungle was going through a mild—very mild—version of rebirth. And so were the nildoror. But it was blasphemous rebirth for them for many reasons. First, because it was held in the wrong place. Second, because it was done without the proper rituals. Third, because the celebrants who guided the nildoror were men, not sulidoror—and so the entire thing became a wicked parody of the most sacred ritual this planet has. By giving those nildoror the venom Kurtz was tempting them to dabble in something diabolical—literally diabolical. Few nildoror can resist that temptation. He found pleasure in the act—both in the hallucinations that the venom gave him and in the tempting of the nildoror. I think he enjoyed the tempting even more than the hallucinations and that was his worst sin. Through it he led innocent nildoror into what passes for damnation on this planet. In twenty years on Belzagor he inveigled hundreds, perhaps thousands, of nildoror into sharing a bowl of venom with him. Finally his presence became intolerable and his own hunger for evil became the source of his destruction. And now he lies upstairs, neither living nor dead, no longer a danger to anything on Belzagor." She got to her feet, stretched voluptuously and beckoned to him. "Let's go back to the station now."

As though this were time's first dawn they walked naked through the garden, close together, the warmth of the sun and the warmth of her body stirring him and raising a fever in him. Twice he considered pulling her to the ground and loving her amidst these alien

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shrubs. Twice he held back, not knowing why. When they were a dozen meters from the house he felt desire climb again and turned to her and put his hand on her breast.

She said, "Tell me one more thing—first."

"If I can."

"Why have you come back to Belzagor? Really. What draws you to the mist country?"

He said, "If you believe in sin you must believe in the possibility of redemption from sin."

"Yes."

"Well, then—I, too, have a sin on my conscience. Perhaps not as grave a sin as the sins of Kurtz but enough to trouble me. I've come back here as an act of expiation."

"How have you sinned?"

"I sinned against the nildoror in the ordinary Earthman way, by collaborating in their enslavement, by patronizing them, by failing to credit their intelligence and their complexity. In particular I sinned by preventing seven nildoror from reaching rebirth on time. Do you remember? When the Monroe dam broke I commandeered those pilgrims for a labor detail. I used a fusion torch to make them obey and, on my account, they missed rebirth. I didn't know that if they were late for rebirth they'd lose their turn—and if I had known it I wouldn't have thought it mattered. Sin within sin within sin. I left here feeling stained. Those seven nildoror bothered me in my dreams. I realized that I had to come back and try to purify myself."

"What kind of expiation do you have in mind?" she asked.

His eyes had difficulty meeting hers. He lowered them but that was worse—her nakedness unnerved him even more as they stood together in the sunlight outside the station. He forced his glance up again.

He said, "I'm determined to find out what rebirth is and to take part in it. I'm going to offer myself to the sulidoror as a candidate."

"No."

"Seena, what's wrong? You—"

She trembled. Her cheeks were blazing and the rush of scarlet spread even to her breasts. She bit her lip, spun away from him, turned back.

"What you're planning is insanity," she said. "Rebirth isn't something for Earthmen. Why do you think you can possibly expiate anything by getting yourself mixed up in an alien religion—by surrendering yourself to a process none of us knows anything about, by—"

"I have to see this through, Seena."

"Don't be crazy."

"It's an obsession. I can't stop. I owe this planet a life and I'm here to pay it. I have to go—regardless of the consequences."

She said, "Come inside the station with me—" her voice flat, mechanical, empty.

"Why?"

"Come inside."

He followed her in silently. She led him to the middle level of the building and into a corridor blocked by one of her robot guardians. At a nod from her the robot

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stepped aside. Outside a room at the rear she paused and put her hand to the door's scanner. The door rolled back. Seena gestured to him to walk in with her.

He heard the grunting, snorting sound that he had heard the night before and now there was no doubt in his mind that it had been a throttled cry of terrible pain.

"This is the room where Kurtz spends his time," Seena said. She drew a curtain that had divided the room. "And this is Kurtz."

"It isn't possible," Gundersen murmured. "How—how—"

"How did he get that way?"

"Yes."

"As he grew older he began to feel remorse for the crimes he had committed. He suffered great guilt and last year he resolved to undertake an act of expiation. He decided to travel to the mist country and undergo rebirth. This is what they brought back to me. This is what a human being looks like, Edmund, when he's undergone rebirth."

XI

WHAT Gundersen beheld was apparently human. Probably it had once been Jeff Kurtz. The absurd body length was surely Kurtzlike, although the figure in the bed seemed to be a man and a half long—as if an extra section of vertebrae and perhaps a second pair of femurs had been spliced in. The skull was plainly Kurtz, too—mighty white dome, jutting, ridged brow. The ridges were even more prominent than Gundersen remembered. They rose above Kurtz' closed eyes like barricades guarding against some invasion from above. But the thick black brows were gone. So were the lush, almost feminine eyelashes.

Below the forehead the face was unrecognizable.

It was as if everything had been heated in a crucible and allowed to melt and run. Kurtz' fine, high-bridged nose was now a rubbery smear, so snoutlike that Gundersen was jolted by its resemblance to a sulidor's. His wide mouth had grown slack—pendulous lips drooped open, revealing toothless gums. His chin sloped back like a pithecanthropoid's. Kurtz' cheekbones were flat and broad, wholly altering the planes of his face.

Seena drew the coverlet down to display the rest. The body in the bed was utterly hairless—a long, boiled-looking pink thing like a giant slug. All superfluous flesh was gone and the skin lay like a shroud over plainly visible ribs and muscles. The proportions of the body were wrong. Kurtz' waist was an impossibly great distance from his chest and his legs, though long, were not nearly as long as they should have been. His ankles seemed to crowd his knees. His toes had fused so that his feet terminated in bestial pads. Perhaps by way of compensation his fingers had added extra joints and were great spidery things that flexed and clenched in irregular rhythms. The attachment of his arms to his torso appeared strange, though it

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ZANE KOTKER

AFTER THEY TOOK THE PANAMA CANAL

ON TUESDAY they took the Panama Canal. On Wednesday Myra went in to work although nobody's mind was on work. Wednesday night Myra wrote to George:

> Why don't we get married now? Or at least you come up here . . .

George's reply came a week later. He repeated a former statement: he loved a busty black-haired girl whose name was not Myra. So that was that.

The gas the invaders used affected only the older people. Myra had been afraid they might use it on all the men as well. But they took only the old. Myra was not

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allowed transit back to her town in Vermont. The burials were held within two days and were run without emotion and without private graves. The bodies were allotted a certain amount of designated area—one body for such and such fraction of an acre. It was explained that decomposition in the shallow graves would help future crops in the rocky soil. Unfortunately a heavy rain fell right after the burials.

The new school administrator handed out the outlines which had been expected. The new language would not be required in all grades for a year. The history was required immediately. Myra's world history course on the ninth-grade level was changed into a civics study and all her pupils were required to learn by heart the tenets of the new law. Her tenth-grade American history course became Historical Images. The invaders were apparently making no attempt to talk against the old ideas but merely to wipe them off the slate, to start with clear positive tenets. No mention was to be made of any of the former subjects. None was.

The system to enforce this arrangement was twofold. Students must report on teachers and teachers on students. At first there were exchanges of secret expressions, imparting more of a sensation of guilt rather than rage. These decreased.

The first revolt was punished by the gassing of the intelligent people of New York. This occurred at midday in the middle of the tenth week. I.Q.'s of under a hundred were not touched. Everyone else was. Myra had had doubts about George's I.Q. but she did not think it went that low. But she had a strong feeling, perhaps induced by desire only, that George had been out of the city. His periodical often sent him away on stories and she knew that since his field was cultural coverage it was possible that he had been at the newly opened Philadelphia exposition of the conqueror's art. When he and Myra had first been in love they had experienced a high degree of success in the transference of ideas both during the day and by the aid of dreams. Neither of them had felt this was an extraordinary phenomenon—they thought about each other most of the time and they could tell by each other's presence just what was on the other's mind.

The days of rape were orderly and controlled. But they did not end. Each of the newly stationed conquerors in the town—there were only fourteen in Greenwich —was issued a cohabitation card. The conquerors were all intelligent and were allowed to breed with intelligent women only. All the women who had gone to college and most of the high-school

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graduates had been tested early and their records were on file. No chance remained of slanting a test toward low grades. Besides, one would not do that anyway because of the work allotments.

The tranquilizing gas was spread every Monday morning. This had become a steady occurrence and the doses were heavy at the beginning—so heavy, in fact, that Myra had little recollection of the first orderly calls of her three allotted administrators. Almost fifty women in Greenwich had been passed as child carriers for the fourteen men and each man was assigned to three women. Myra could expect one a week in rotation.

Two of hers were tall and looked quite healthy and very much alike. The third was taller still but quite thin and not quite so robust. He demanded little of her and looked and seemed distracted much of the time. Often he quit his assignment halfway through and demanded nothing at all. The others were perfunctory and displayed pleasure without emotion.

A sort of tranquilizing chemical was added to the food as well. Unfortunately it betrayed a urine-like taste which soon pervaded all of what Myra ate.

Had Myra had many friends before the invasion she might have found a little solace in companionship. Friendships were allowed to continue—meetings at the homes of one's friends were permitted as long as one was at home on the nights when services were demanded. But Myra lived in Greenwich only a short time and had spent most of that thinking of George. She still spent most of her time thinking of George and once in a while tried to imagine what she could do against the invasion. But the drugs were used so heavily that she could not concentrate.

Her mind kept going back to the day when everyone had become sure of what had happened. But her sureness had been hindsight. She had always been afraid of the dark and had slept with the radio on all her days at Greenwich. The radio had played teenage tunes most of the afternoon. The news accounts had consisted of singing weather reports. There had, in fact, been no mention at all of what was happening.

"So we went out by Musack, after all," was Myra's main reaction to the day.

TWO years after they took the Panama Canal the tranquilizing dose had been lowered. The work level had been raised and the food quota had been cut in half. But Myra, being pregnant, was allowed more food than anyone else. She had, furthermore, learned her fate—she would be allowed to bear two children and

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care for them until each was five and then she would either be shipped to a smaller population area to drudgery or executed. The first would come about only if she could convince the government of her loyalty. Very few were allowed this chance—the government had people of its own trained from a much younger age. Once she had borne two intelligent children, since she was a member of the generation that remembered, her productiveness would drop to teaching courses in civics and historical myth. And in the new children's camps both chores were handled by machines.

She had discovered her fate from the thin administrator whose child she perhaps bore. She hoped the child was his but, of course, she could not be sure. He and she spoke to each other less now than they had at first. The edict on speaking the conqueror's language had been passed a year ago and she had not become too proficient. When the two others came to her bed she cared so little for their presence that she did much of her serious thinking at that time. The administrators brought small servings of whiskey when they came on the theory that better children would result. The whiskey cut the haze in Myra's mind and led her to a passion of thought. When the thin one came she and he solemnly drank the allotment and then solemnly went to bed. The man's actions betrayed no passion whatsoever but he did exhibit a great tenderness —although he never spoke at such moments.

He would stroke her hair, something even George had never done. He would trace the features of her face with his fingers and he would turn her face to his and stare into her eyes, so that Myra often felt she was on the verge of being hypnotized, although she knew that to mesmerize her was not his intention. His eyes were gray, almost whitish at times, and very transparent in the colored area when she viewed him from the side. His hands and feet were long. Myra began to wonder if she loved him. The idea presented such absurd angles that she amused herself with this reverie.

Temptation had visited her before she became pregnant. During the second year of the invasion she had begun to accuse herself. Why did she not rebel? She could partially forgive the women of the town when she saw them in the streets with their children. Their first interest was rightly the care of those children—but why, really, since they would be sent away?

Nevertheless, Myra felt that she had perhaps a special responsibility. She had no family to care for and she had been educated.

In the spring she thought she would try to get hold of some kind of suicide potion. She would get up

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early in the morning and write a lot of signs with the magic marker she would bring home from school. DO NOT FORGET—ARISE—DEFEND—FIGHT were words she would write on pieces of paper she would strew along the street and, under one enormous sign tied to a stake, she would administer the potion to herself at dawn. But she did not want those who heeded her exhortations to be killed. Nor could she see how any revolt at all would have any effect. The chemical weapons of America had been long since taken over—besides, who knew how to work them? And without them there was no hope. Brute force was out of the question.

The burning of the books took place at this point in her life and here Myra did exhibit courage and here she did work according to plan. She had suspected from the beginning of the invasion that a book-burning would take place sooner or later. When less drugged moments gave her any lucidity she planned what books she would save and where she would hide them. The move was a dangerous one. Her natural reaction was to pick Shakespeare, the Bible, a book on Einstein, Greek plays, a guide to western art and an anthology of English and American poetry. Then she began to question each book.

That inner debate went on for months. The Greek plays were dropped easily from her selections—she got a syllabus of the holdings of the new library and they were listed as evidently not dangerous. She had doubts about the Bible—rational action was needed now more than mysticism. Still it was the oldest continuous historical record she could think of and that would be important. How were people to find out later that life had not always been like this? Was Shakespeare really good enough to save? Or was she taking him on hearsay? The Einstein book? She dumped that on the theory that anyone being able to put the theories into use would be a member of the government and thus have access to parallel material. Besides, she did not understand it. She retained the art book and the poetry.

But the book-burning day was announced sooner than she had anticipated. She had by then figured out only one hiding place. She had decided she had better have places that would look as if the books had been accidentally overlooked in case she were discovered. But she could only think of one like that and she used it for her volume of Shakespeare, slipping it under the seat of the stuffed chair in her living room. She put the art book in an empty sugar box in her kitchen cabinet and the Bible in the mechanical sweeper.

That made three books and she

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was sure of none. The rest would have to go.

BUT that night when the thin administrator came he sat in the stuffed chair and asked for a cup of coffee. Why hadn't she remembered that that was often his custom? He did not seem to notice the presence of the book, however.

He called for her to come and sit on his lap after he had finished his coffee. He held her hand that night—he had never held her hand so gently. She rested her arm on the arm of the chair and looked down at him. They spoke slowly in the new language. He covered her knee with his other hand.

"I love to look at your hair because it is clean and soft," he said.

She had no reply.

"You must grow your hair longer so it will wave and catch in the light."

"All right."

"You look much like my sister."

"Oh."

Then he put his head on her breast and dozed. After ten minutes she tried to move but he held her there. After half an hour he opened his eyes.

"You may get up."

She stood up and went to get his coat.

When she returned he held the Shakespeare book in his hand. He put it into his coat pocket, kissed her forehead and left.

Now she had the Bible and the art book. She had not been able to find a place for the poetry book.

Then the passion which was to govern her until the birth of her child took hold. She developed a great remorse for the loss of her Shakespeare. She came to feel obligated to act. She came to feel guilty. She must restore Shakespeare to the world.

But she could not remember the plays. At night, when she was free, she worked with a pen and scrap paper. She wrote what she remembered about the quality of mercy not being strained. But that was about all she remembered of mercy's not being strained.

Cry havoc and let loose the dogs of war . . .

That was more to the point but too late. So she took to noting down the plots of the plays.

MacBeth: a man and his wife, mostly his wife, kill someone rich and powerful but after they have killed, they feel so bad they can't do anything else. And someone comes at them disguised in a forest.

Hamlet: a prince's father was murdered and he is supposed to handle the revenge on the

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new king who did it, but he does not quite get to the point and kills everybody else instead.

Tempest: a wise, old, powerful, kind man fixes up what he has control over and guides it toward good and then knows his time is up and does himself in.

But these sketches did not satisfy her. She felt perhaps she had not understood all of what must have been meant in the plays and developed an even more gnawing appetite for the lost book. She began long exegeses on the scratch paper. The pen was thin and ill-working and the paper blotched and she went on night after night elaborating on the slender themes she could remember. Her frustration grew and her anger grew and her guilt grew and in the morning when she awoke with a great sense of loss and a great vagueness as to just what the loss was she named it —the book that her thin conqueror lover had taken away.

One morning the sense of loss overcame her even more strongly. She cried out loud when she awoke and she did not feel well throughout her body. She never missed a day of the school and she was frightened to report an absence from her work schedule. She went to her classes but the nurse sent her to the clinic, where she was told she was pregnant. She worked into the eigth month.

HER knowledge of her pregnancy seemed to relieve the urgency of what she felt about the lost book. Though she grew melancholy and sentimental over the child and over the book, she no longer had energy for her scratchings in the night.

She looked at the slow bulge in her stomach, ran her hands over and around it and shook down the hair she had let grow long. It caught more light that it used to. She washed her body and her face more often than usual and speculated seriously on the father of the child. He was probably the second of the two men who seemed so alike and who spoke to her in the ideology of the government. But could she be pregnant by her thin lover? She would like his child. She had told him of its coming before she told the others.

"No," he said.

He did not think the child was his. Didn't she remember? They had not slept together that week at all. Or those weeks. They had eaten and rested but there had been no intimacy. It was strange that she had forgotten—but she had. And now: it was convenient for her not to remember.

She was sorry he did not want to claim fatherhood of her child. But he did not and, as the time

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grew nearer, she began to fancy that perhaps it was George's, from some sperm of years before that had only now yeasted or whatever sperm did. She would call the child George. She thought and thought of George and when she was allowed to leave work in her last month she thought more and more of him, remembering and wondering. Had he been killed in the New York punishment? No, she was certain of that by now. He was still alive and she felt it. Each day she felt it more. Had he capitulated to the enemy? No doubt. George was a little like that. But then, one could say she had capitulated too. One met few heroes these days. In fact, she could not recall one. Was he living with the other girl? No doubt. It didn't matter. He would only take another girl because he could not get to Myra. He should have some comfort.

He will come back. I will see him one day. I will see . . .

Once during the night she dialed George's old number but she woke up someone named Harry who was terribly mad and had never heard of George. Then the baby came and they did not give her any anesthesia because of bad effects it might have on the child and she did not care for about eight hours if she lived or died and it was worse than she had ever imagined.

When they brought the child to her there was something about it she definitely did not like. She knew then that it was not George's. It was not even her thin conqueror-lover's baby. It was the exact image of both of her other two males. And it hurt her terribly when it fed.

She liked it a little better after she got it home. But most of all she liked the freedom it gave her from the two fathers, but she missed seeing her thin lover once a week. Strange that she did not know any of her lovers' names—perhaps they had none. She had nothing to do for six weeks but care for the child. Her meals were brought in to her for a while and her extra work was done. She became almost gay. To entertain herself and to keep away soberer thoughts, she took the art book out of the sugar box and began to draw. She used a few basic food stuffs to make weak water color paints and she made a paint brush from her own hair. Then she got a little carried away and made six paint brushes, thin ones and thick ones, and began to paint directly on the walls.

First she was still caught up in the spirit of the Shakespeare crusade and she tried to copy over her living room walls some of the works of the masters. But these came out poorly. The DaVinci *Last Supper* merely faded into the paper over the couch and she could not reproduce the perfection of the lines or come anywhere near the

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depth of colors of any of the paintings in the Renaissance section of the book. Next she tried to study the human body and made black outlines of her hands and feet on the white wood of the doorway but they were not too well executed. She turned finally to wild and loose depictions of animals she remembered from childhood walks in the woods. These she put in her bedroom when she ran out of living room space. She did rather free-expression sketches of cows she had seen in pastures of her childhood, all turning to look at you as you pass on the dirt road. She drew quick, running horses under winter trees and spare suns. She drew a fat elephant for the baby along with some giraffes and cats.

She worked on the walls of her bedroom late at night by low light. Only a soft glow illumined her work, a glow like that at sunset just inside the opening of a cave. Seeing it, she could sleep.

But as the child grew she became vexed at her paintings. She was irritated at the mess in the living room and enjoyed only at certain times of day the animals in her bedroom. She stopped combing her hair and washing and she grew frantic with the baby. She would coax him and tickle him, tickle him too much, too long, forcing him to laugh more than he wanted to. Shaking him and even at times pulling up the corners of his mouth into an artificial smile. She grew to hate the child.

He was, after all, the first mark against her. Another child plus five years and then they would kill her. Or send her to a labor camp and she could no longer stand to wash her little daily rotation of dishes.

AFTER six weeks, the government let the men come back. They were to employ contraception for two years but they were to be allowed to satisfy their desires during that time. And for the sake of order all fourteen stayed with the same women.

Each of the healthy administrators thought of the baby as his own. Her tall, thin lover—she took to calling him Tall in her mind because it actually described him better to her than Thin, although he was both—patted the baby on the head but he did not seem to care for it very much.

How nice it was to see him. Myra felt warm in his presence. She was ashamed of her shaggy hair and her unwashed face.

"Myra," he said as he came in through the door.

He smothered her in his arms, against his chest, and held her there and laughed at her. He took the whiskey from his coat pocket and went into the kitchen to fix drinks for them.

"Ah, Myra," he said and kissed her and they made love before

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they drank and for the first time Myra thought to herself, *We are making love—that is what we are doing.*

Tall was gay afterwards and would not let her dress but took her into the kitchen and washed her with a dish towel and brushed her hair and then they drank.

"Dance," he said and he poured her another glass of whiskey.

They sat in the bedroom. Tall turned off the light and lit a candle he had brought her during the winter. The light flickered on the walls and Tall sang a strange, alien song and beat out the tune on the bed and then on the walls. She had no clue to the real meaning of the words—he knew only the elementals of his tongue.

"Dance."

And Myra danced under the walls and for the first time in years felt joy in her feet and in her hands and in the wild hair that caught her heels on the floor and twisted and sang and laughed as she sang and called Tall's name and George's name and—once—the name of God.

She began to weep as she danced but the dance grew even longer then. She twisted her hands and wept and Tall stopped singing and only watched and grew sad and wept as well. Finally she fell on the bed and Tall picked her up and showed her her own face in the mirror on her wall and his face beside it. Then he picked up a paint brush that was made from Myra's hair and dipped it in a color and while they both looked in the mirror, he traced the outlines of their faces there right on the surface of the mirror and underneath he wrote their names and then they made love again but the baby cried and soon they fed it.

Myra brought up George and taught him to speak the new tongue and tried to love him but she could not. She set him tasks that were too hard for him to do in order to trick him and he became an unhappy child. They both became sick in an epidemic of flu and often in the night, when he cried, Myra did not tend to him, partly because she was sick and partly because she did not want to. She recovered from the flu but the child did not. He was taken to the clinic and died there. The two men who might have been his father were not kind to her after that. They struck her and forced her more than was comfortable. But she was glad the child had died. She felt she had accomplished something.

The child died in its third year. But he still counted against Myra. There would be only one more. One more child—plus five years.

Myra went back to work at the school. Usually she thought about nothing. When she thought it was about Tall. She prayed now and then. She prayed to Pan and Venus and God and Jehovah and

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Brahma and even the serpent in the garden that the next child would be Tall's.

Ten months after the first child died she felt once again that she might be pregnant. She told Tall immediately and did not tell the others.

"Yes," he said. He thought it was his this time. He remembered, yes, he remembered a time when he had felt for sure there would be a child. They were happy and gentle.

When Tall came the next week he announced that he would not come again. He was asking the administration for a new woman, since he found this one unproductive and cold.

"Tall!"

He asked for her trust. He asked for her love, he spoke against the government. He said that he would stay alive until she was taken for execution but that he planned a kind of espionage and he did not want his child or her to feel the consequences of association with him. "Feel" was the word he used in his strange tongue, which had no word for "suffer."

He would not explain. He would give no details. But he knew his mind. They would meet every Friday in the town square at three and pass each other on the street, but they would not speak.

She must bring up the child as rapidly as she could. She must learn to speak to it before it was sent away. She must tell the child of its father.

HE KISSED her on the forehead. He went out. Myra took the sheets from the bed and burned them in the sink and braided her hair around her head and did not unbraid it until the child was born.

He was a long thin child with gray eyes that looked transparent when she viewed him from the side but she did not dare to name him Yuri. She took down her hair and washed it and braided it and then she took the razor and cut the braid just below the nape of her neck and fastened the top of the braid and hid it beneath the cushion of the easy chair.

After that she made a constant struggle against time. The five years were no longer her years. They belonged to the child. She worked with him from the earliest days, trying to speed his development. She must get him to talk and understand before the government reached him. She had him knowing simple vocabulary just a little after he was one year old. She did not teach him English—to do so would have been too daring and he might give himself away. She kept him healthy and she drew pictures for him and sang songs to him and she rocked him and she swung him and she did not try to make him laugh. He was a quick and sober child.

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As he grew older she taught him to paint and draw and sing. She taught him rhymes and tunes and dances. She taught him games to play but above all she tried to speed his progress in the language.

She took him with her when she walked to the town square on Fridays. She passed Tall with the child in her arms and with the child by the hand and when she got home she would explain to George and tell him about the need for secrecy. She taught him duplicity and how to lie. She won him over as solidly as she could and she tried to teach him to beat the government at every turn.

But he was only a child and she could never be sure. She was afraid but when she passed the square on Friday she was not afraid and the weekends only saw her redoubling her efforts.

But she could not decide what to teach him. She must be simple, she must pick out only a few things and then have him understand that he must not say anything about them when they took him to the camp. He must think only at night when the lights were out in the dormitories. He must offer no resistance during the training. But he must remember. He must remember. What?

That grass is green, what else? That wood is wood and God is good? She grew sad and she began to have a return of the morning sensation she had first experienced when she lost the book. Duplicity would be more important than honesty. Shrewdness more important than bravery. He must remember, though. He must remember. But how could she teach him all that she had learned.

One night in August when the moon was dark she took the Bible from the dust broom and the art book from the sugar box and went out to the back yard. She dug up some earth with the spade, wrapped the books in heavy cloth and buried them and showed the child how he could tell where they were without a marker. But where would he learn English? She could not answer that.

Her thirty-fifth birthday came in the child's fourth year. Her neck had grown thin and her jowls loose and her face was lined and she saw the aging in Tall when she passed him in the street and it made her love him more. That he also aged made him less an alien. The bone showed in her leg and the veins stood around her knee and she wondered if George would know of her age or her death.

She grew desperate about the child and could not decide what to do during the last half year that she had.

"Do not come to the Square next week," he said in August. Then: "Myra," he said and looked at her the way he had the first time he had come to her place. "Child," he said and stared for a long time

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at the boy. They passed. Myra did not go the square next Friday.

EARLY that Friday morning Tall killed himself in the center of the public square in this manner: first he made a large sign and stuck it in the dirt. Then he took a black marker and wrote *Remember* in large letters on every page of the Shakespeare book, which he had carefully cut from its binding with a sharp blade. Then he placed himself at the foot of the post and slashed his throat before dawn.

In the morning when the people came to work the pages of the book were scattered through the square by the wind and some of the people picked them up and secreted them and when they saw the words in the old language, although they had only one page, they could not swallow and they blinked over and over again.

On the large placard was written: REMEMBER: IN MY COUNTRY, TOO.

Myra only heard accounts of this from her neighbors. It was the first time the neighbors had mentioned the old ways since the invasion. But Myra did go into the square as soon as she heard.

She found Yuri in the center of a glass-windowed store front. His body had been stripped and the nails pulled. His genitals had been mutilated and his eyes removed. The page from the book and the word *remember* on it had been stuck by a long stick into his chest.

Myra was overwhelmed with a great feeling of happiness. She was happy that Yuri had died long before the torture. She went back and brought down the child.

The children were told that after ten years in the camp, they would be free to seek out their mothers. But this was a lie. Their mothers were usually executed by then. Myra did not tell the child this. But she told him everything else. She told him about America and she told him about freedom and she told him about his father's death. She told him about Einstein and about the countryside where she had been a child and she told him about Jesus, Da Vinci and about as many things as she could name and explain in the time that was left.

She had told only one. But he must tell two. He must somewhere find two he trusted before he died. And they must find two. And that was all. She loved him. But remembering was more important and telling even more important than remembering. So they took the child on his fifth birthday and they took Myra the same day.

She removed the braided hair from the easy chair and folded it between her breasts and she went out with them to the shipment station and they took her to New York. And when she walked into the chamber, she saw George again. ✱

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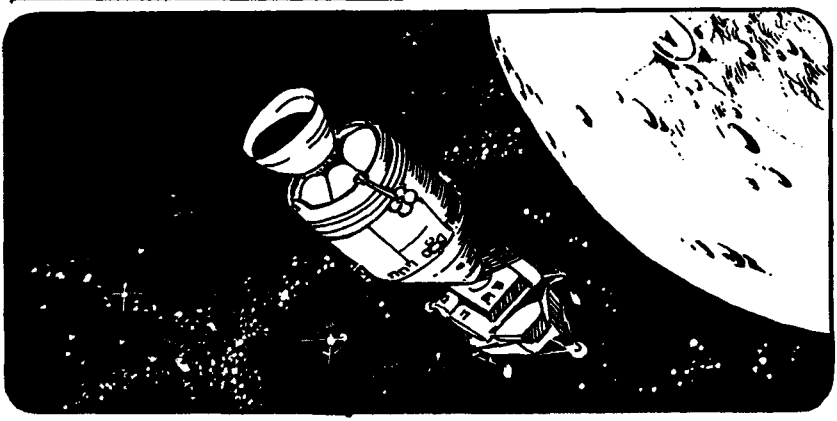
SUNPOT

by VAUGHN BODĒ ©1970 by VE BODĒ

OUT IN THE SUNNY VACUUMS OF ETERNAL AFTERNOON, ALMOST TO THE MOON, ALMOST INTO ORBIT, GOES A NEW APOLLO. IT FALLS TOWARD THE QUIET, MASSIVE MONSTER AND ANOTHER LANDING FOR MAN....



THE JUNIOR PILOT SEES A BRIGHT, FLIPPING OBJECT PASS A MILE BELOW. IT IS QUICKLY LOST IN BRILLIANCE..

NO KIDDING, IT WAS A DAMN MOON SATELLITE, BRIGHT AS A PIECE OF TIN IN THE SUN!

HELL, WHAT YOU PROBABLY SAW WAS A FLICK OF ALUMINUM PACKING FROM THE LEM...

WHAT HE SAW WAS NO FLICK OF FLAKE, NOR MOON SATELLITE.. WHAT HE SAW WAS A BEAN WITH HANDS!!

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SUNPOT SHIP, THIS IS, BELINDA BUMP, IN BODY BEAN FIVE... I HAD TO ABANDON THE LOUSY DAMN BOUY POD TRANSMITTER!... AN AMERICAN APOLLO IS RIGHT BEHIND ME!
OKAY, NECTAR NIPPLES, DIS IS DR. ELECTRIC ON DA HORN, WHAT'S THA' PROBLUM?
AN APOLLO, YOU MECHANICAL WASP!! IT'S GOIN' INTO ORBIT, IT WILL SEE THE BLOODY SHIP!!
EASY WIF DA' NAMES, SWEET-HEART OR I'LL CUT OFF YOUR BUBBLE BATH ALLOTMENT..
YOU BATTERY OPERATED PYTHON, THIS IS NO TIME FOR YOUR STATIC HUMOR, DO SOMETHING!!
BELINDA, BABE, I AM JUST TALKING TO FARKFOOT, HE THINKS WE SHOULD SHOOT DOWN DA' APOLLO...
GOOD IDEA!

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WHY DON'T WE JUST MOVE AWAY FROM THE MOON BEFORE THE APOLLO COMES BY?..
YOU IS BUSTY, BUT DUMB!. WE CAN'T MOVE OFF UNTIL WE START DA POWER FACTORY SO, ITS EASIER JUST TO SHOOT EM' DOWN.. LOGIC..
SCREW
NO SIEH.
SCREW BOSS, YOU BETTER HAVE ONE OF YER 'STUPID, RUSTY SCREWS' CHECK THE OIL NEXT TIME.!!.. WHERE'S DR. ELECTRIC?
MY, SCREWS IS GOOD BOYS, THEY MAKE LOTTA' MISTAKES, BUT THEM LEARNIN' LIKE BLUE-LIGHTING. THEY JUS' NOT GOOD AS SYNTHETICS..
DR. ELECTRIC, HAVE WE GOT THE APOLLO ON OUR TRACKING SCREENS YET?.. HUM?..
ALL OUR FORTS ARE LOCKED ON.. APOLLO GONNA' PASS WITHIN' 100 YARDS, SO, ONLY A MORON WOULD MISS AT DAT RANGE. LET'S GO UP TO THA WHEEL HOUSE..

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WOBBLE BOOBS, I HOPES DIS DISPLAY OF BRUTE POWER WILL IMPRESS YOU INTO CANNING DA' CRACKS..
UM, LAST TIME YOU DISPLAYED BRUTE FORCE, YOU BLEW OUT TWO CONDENSERS IN, YOU-KNOW-WHERE..
FARK FOOT HERE! TO DO DA FIRE SIGNAL... APOLLO IS ON DA' TARGET & CLOSING!! STAND READY!!
REEFER GUNS, FIRE!!
BOOM!
HEY!! HEY YOU GUYS!! I JUST SAW A WHOLE PACK OF MOON SATELLITES GO SHOOTIN' BY!!
OH MAN.. TOO MUCH.. JUST SHUTUPAN SIT DOWN...
TO BE CONTINUED

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(Continued from page 2)

Scheffing Institute—and a wolf of Wall Street can instantly become a connoisseur of the arts. Or an even abler wolf.

The story Silverberg has to tell is the story of the struggle between John Roditis, upstart Greek billionaire, and Mark Kaufmann, new titular head of the aristocratic Kaufmann family related by a thousand strands of time, common cause and blood kinship with the Rothschilds, the Schiffs, the Lehmans and the other great names of finance. The object of the struggle is the persona of the recently dead grand old buccaneer, Mark's uncle Paul Kaufmann.

Clearly, Roditis cannot be permitted to acquire this dynamic added increment to his already burgeoning character. Just as obviously, few other members of even the elite can command the strength of will to prevent Paul's character from overwhelming their own personalities and becoming a dybbuk—a resurrected persona in command of a stolen body whose true owner, if he survives at all, survives only as shreds and tatters caught in the lowest, darkest recesses of his own brain.

Complicating Mark Kaufmann's problem as he tries to forestall Roditis is an Institute rule that prevents him from simply purchasing and acquiring the persona of such a close relative as his uncle. Aggravating his annoyance is the fact that if Roditis does acquire Paul, he will then perforce become a member of the Kaufmann social circle and the *nouveau riche* Greek will have to be invited to tea.

And of course neither of these latter two complications are rational in terms of Silverberg's original premise; nor is his practice, early in the book, of referring to the personae as "souls." All three notions, mind you, add significantly to the power of his narrative but they are nonsense in the context of the fairly straightforward suspense story he then actually writes.

That story—the one you get by reading this book in your best Evelyn Wood Dynamics manner—is an acceptable and entertaining one, particularly ornamented by the at first subsidiary development of Risa, Mark's daughter, who is beyond doubt one of Silverberg's best characterizations ever. But the real effect of this book has nothing to do with its overt events.

Let me explain, first, that I was genuinely moved by this story while at the same time appreciating the fact that it's rather plainly assembled, with many features painted on indifferently framed canvas instead of being mortared together in real brick. I suspect that you may well be moved by it, too. And now the question is, why?

Risa is much more attractive as

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a case history than she really is as a person. So are her father and uncle Paul. All three of them are far too self-sufficient to care whether anyone identifies with them, let alone you or me. Roditis, oddly enough, appears for the most part only as an utterer of dialogue. At the very end Silverberg speaks of his vitality; my first reaction was, What vitality? I knew him almost entirely as a querulous voice bullying a subordinate.

So it isn't character identification that transmits this book's peculiar potency. And it isn't the power of prose images, either; Silverberg uses few silver nails in his carpentry.

Where this book works is where it isn't either science or fiction.

I mean, would rational minds confuse an electronic echo with the soul? Would they invite it to dinner? Is it incest to take an uncle into one's mind?

Would it comfort your dying to know that someone else would inherit your memories? Could those memories, packed into otherwise unused portions of the cerebral matrix, leak over into previously occupied incremental spaces and, in an organized manner, oust those discrete bits, again retaining an organized manner? That's what you'd need, to achieve the melodramatic persona-battles, back and forth, Silverberg depicts here. And if it happened, is it likely, really likely, that the world would adopt the particular slang term, *dybbuk*?

I doubt it. I think the very best parts of this book are the unwritten ones, the ones that play on the good old half-buried fears and longings, the love-death pushmepullyou that drives men in the old, old quest whose by-product is power.

MASQUE WORLD, by Alexei Panshin (Ace #02320, 60¢), is the third story in the Anthony Villiers series that also includes *Star Well* (02318, 50¢) and *The Thurb Revolution* (02319, 50¢). In this latest number, Villiers—otherwise Viscount Charteris—and his companion, Torve the Trog, continue what may eventually be an explicit saga or ballade about a younger son's life in a vaguely feudal interstellar empire.

It makes for a charming creation. The imperial background may or may not prove eventually relevant. Meanwhile, it furnishes an excuse for Panshin to introduce all the elements, quaint or not, technological or medieval, required to spin out his well-told stories. He can introduce both a robot butler and a lecherous old procurator, the latter given to dropping overripe melons down palace stairwells at other men's wives. And he can introduce an imperial envoy into a real identity crisis *via* a Trog suit. With the whole thing coming to a head at peelgrunt.

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What? Oh, that's when the peels grunt, of course.

Read the book. Stop asking silly questions.

THE PALACE OF ETERNITY, by Bob Shaw (Ace Special 65050, 75¢), was sent to me with a covering note from the editor that read: "Hope you like it better than his last one." Well, his last one was *The Two-Timers*, which I did not like all that much, though I reserved some kind remarks for Shaw's ability. I still think quite well of Shaw as a writer. But it's clear from this latest example that he's still not a novelist.

In the present instance what begins as a routine space opera with Van Vogtian overtones soon catalyzes into a Van Vogtian mystical exercise with images from Eric Frank Russell. If you like space opera the ending will cheat you. If you admire Van Vogt, it's a very long hike to the first double take. Either way, I'd think an editor would more properly say something like "Hope he's done better this time."

But that concept may be a little difficult to grasp. Also thus, judging by the context of other notes from management, is the essential invidiousness of sending advance-advance copies of the Ace Specials to carefully selected persons and then carefully selecting only the laudatory responses for the blurbs on the covers.

From a purely practical standpoint, of course, I can think of few more effective devices for marketing an original paperback, in the face of reprints which are free to select an isolated sentence about the hardcover edition from a review in the Hartford *Courant* or a paragraph from the "review" column of a West Texas weekly that is actually made up out of quotes from publishers' press releases. But it is a marketing device and I can't fully understand what makes Ace so idignant to me when I merely point it out. Can you?

THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS, by Ursula K. Le Guin (Ace Special 47800, 95¢) is stuccoed-over with a semi-relevant quote from Michael Moorcock, a Ted White quote that thinks to praise this book by equating it with Frank Herbert's *Dune*—and then, inside, even a laudatory quote from Frank Herbert. But a book like this needs no introduction and is in fact embarrassed by these adumbrations, even the nice one from Damon Knight.

This is a narrative so fully realized, so compellingly told, so masterfully executed that even an editor should have the wit to just show it to his readers and stand back. With the exception of Damon Knight, not one of these attorneys is a peer of this client.

Meanwhile, what's the book about? Will I like it? Should I buy

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it? Try to discover that from this testimonial matter and you learn two things. 1) It's got "Ideas that reflect many of the central concerns of Western society, to say nothing of imagery reminiscent of Beardsley and the melody and wit of a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta," according to Mike Moorcock. 2) It's a novel of "exotic adventure on a far planet whose people are completely human except for one thing: they are all of the same sex," according to the blurb writer on the first page.

Bull doody. Leaving aside the Moorcock quote, which reflects a critical expository style reminiscent of *Playboy's* movie reviews, to say nothing of the logical level attained in the editorial replies in "Letters to Superman," this is a novel of adventure on a planet whose ambi-sexual human inhabitants go through an oestrus cycle in which they may play either the male or female role.

It is, being a novel written by a magnificent writer, a totally compelling tale of human peril and striving under circumstances in which human love, and a number of other noble qualities, can be depicted in a fresh context. In that context, they display attributes and effects not possible in the ordinary adventure novel.

Only by conceiving, for instance, does a member of this cast of characters remain a female for more than a few days, and even so she raises her child, after lactation ceases, as an individual indistinguishable from the child's no longer sexual father. Yet the three love each other, though years and distances may separate them.

What this world has to teach its only heterosexual human, galactic ambassador Genly Ai, is what it also teaches us. I can't imagine anyone reading it and not learning profoundly from it. Anyone, that is, but the endorsers and editors whose other concerns seem not to have allowed sufficient time for either perceptive thought or meaningful utterance.

See you next month, space buffs! Till then, this is your old buddy, Blaster Al, sayin' so long until we meet again on the Starlanes! ★

Notice To All Readers

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We are NOT—repeat NOT—skipping an issue of *Galaxy*. The cover date of what would have been the January issue has been changed to February to give *Galaxy* and its sister publication, *If*, equivalent sales periods on the newsstands. All subscriptions are being updated accordingly.

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(Continued from page 124)

was not until Gundersen saw Kurtz slowly rotate his left arm through a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree twist that he realized the armpit must have been reconstructed into some kind of versatile ball-and-socket arrangement.

Kurtz struggled desperately to speak, blurting words in a language Gundersen had never heard. His eyeballs visibly stirred beneath his lids. His tongue slipped forth to moisten his lips. Something like a three-lobed adam's apple bobbed in his throat. Briefly he humped his body, drawing the skin tight over curiously broadened bones. He continued to speak. Occasionally an intelligible word in English or nildororu emerged, embedded in a flow of gibberish.

"River . . . death . . . lost . . . horror . . . river . . . cave . . . warm . . . smash . . . black . . . go . . . god . . . horror . . . born . . . lost . . . "

"What is he saying?" Gundersen asked.

"No one knows. Even when we can understand the words he doesn't make sense. And mostly we can't even understand the words."

"Has he been conscious at all?"

"Not really," Seena said. "Sometimes his eyes are open but he never responds to anything around him. Come. Look."

She went to the bed and drew Kurtz' eyelids open. Gundersen saw eyes that had no whites at all. From rim to rim their shining surfaces were a deep, lustrous black, dappled by random spots of light blue. He held three fingers up before those eyes and waved his hand from side to side. Kurtz took no notice. Seena released the lids and the eyes remained open, even when the tips of Gundersen's fingers approached quite closely. But as Gundersen withdrew his hand, Kurtz lifted his right hand and seized Gundersen's wrist. The grotesquely elongated fingers encircled the wrist completely, met, and coiled halfway around it again. Slowly and with tremendous strength Kurtz pulled Gundersen down until he was kneeling beside the bed.

NOW KURTZ spoke only in English. As before, he seemed to be in desperate anguish, forcing the words out of some nightmare recess, with no perceptible accenting or punctuation: "Water sleep death save sleep sleep fire love water dream cold sleep plan rise fall rise rise rise." After a moment he added, "Fall." Then the flow of nonsense-syllables returned and the fingers relinquished their fierce grip on Gundersen's wrist.

Seena said, "He seemed to be telling us something. I never heard him speak so many consecutive intelligible words."

"But what was he saying?"

"I can't tell you that. But a meaning was there."

Gundersen nodded. The tormented Kurtz had delivered his testament, his blessing.

. . . sleep plan rise fall rise fall rise rise. Fall.

Perhaps it even made sense.

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"And he reacted to your presence," Seena went on. "He saw you, he took your arm. Say something to him. See if you can get his attention again."

"Jeff?" Gundersen whispered, kneeling. "Jeff, do you remember me? Edmund Gundersen. I've come back, Jeff. Can you hear anything I'm saying? If you understand me, Jeff, raise your right hand again."

Kurtz did not raise his hand. He uttered a strangled moan, low and appalling. Then his eyes slowly closed and he lapsed into a rigid silence. Muscles rippled beneath his altered skin. Beads of acrid sweat broke from his pores. Gundersen rose to his feet shortly and walked away.

"How long was he up there?" he asked.

"Close to half a year. I thought he was dead. Then two sulidoror brought him back on a kind of stretcher."

"Changed. And here he lies. He's changed much more than you imagine," Seena said. "Inside, everything's new and different. He's got almost no digestive tract at all. Solid food is impossible for him—I give him fruit juices. His heart has extra chambers. His lungs are twice as big as they should be. The diagnostat couldn't tell me a thing—because he didn't correspond to any of the parameters for a human body."

"And this happened to him in rebirth?"

"In rebirth, yes. They take a drug and it changes them. And it works on humans, too. It's the same drug they use on Earth for organ regeneration—the venom—but here they use a stronger dose and the body runs wild. If you go up there, Edmund, this is what'll happen to you."

"How do you know it was rebirth that did this to him?"

"I know."

"How?"

"That's what he said he was going up there for. And the sulidoror who brought him back said he had undergone rebirth."

"Maybe they were lying. Maybe rebirth is one thing, a beneficial thing, and there's another thing—a harmful thing—they gave to Kurtz because he had been so evil."

"You're deceiving yourself," Seena said. "There's only one process and this is its result."

"Possibly different people respond differently to the process, then. If there is only one process. But I still say you can't be sure that it was rebirth that actually did this to him."

"Don't talk nonsense."

"I mean it. Maybe something within Kurtz made him turn out like this and I'd turn out another way. A better way."

"Do you want to be changed, Edmund?"

"I'd risk it."

"You'd cease to be human."

"I've tried being human for quite a while. Maybe it's time to try something else."

"I won't let you go," Seena said.

"You won't? What claim do you have on me?"

"I've already lost Jeff to them.

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If you go up there too, Edmund—"

"Yes?"

She faltered. "All right. I've got no way to threaten you. But don't go."

"I have to."

"You're just like him! Puffed up with the importance of your own supposed sins. Imagining the need for some kind of ghastly redemption. It's sick, don't you see? You just want to hurt yourself, in the worst possible way." Her eyes glittered even more brightly. "Listen to me. If you need to suffer—I'll help you. You want me to whip you? Stamp on you? I'll play sadist for you if you've got to play masochist. I'll give you all the torment you want. But don't go up mist country. That's carrying a game too far, Edmund."

"You don't understand, Seena."

"Do you?"

"Perhaps I will, when I come back from there."

"You'll come back like Kurtz!" she screamed. She rushed toward Kurtz' bed. "Look at him! Look at those feet! Look at his eyes! His mouth, his nose, his fingers, his everything! He isn't human any more. Do you want to lie there like him—muttering nonsense, living in some weird dream all day and all night?"

Gundersen wavered.

"I have to go," he said, less firmly than before.

"He's living in hell," Seena said. "You'll be there too."

She came to Gundersen and pressed herself against him. He felt the hot tips of her breasts grazing his skin. Her hands clawed his back desperately. Her thighs pressed his. A great sadness came over him for all that Seena once had meant to him, for all that she had been, for what she had become, for what her life must be like with a monster to care for. He was shaken by a vision of the lost and irrecoverable past, of the dark and uncertain present, of the bleak, frightening future. Again he wavered. Then he gently pushed her away from him.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm going."

"Why? Why? What a waste!" Tears trickled down her cheeks. "If you need a religion," she said, "pick an Earth religion. There's no reason why you have to—"

"There is a reason," Gundersen said. He drew her close to him again and very lightly kissed her eyelids, then her lips. Then he kissed her between the breasts and released her. He walked over to Kurtz and stood for a moment looking down, trying to come to terms with the man's bizarre metamorphosis. Now he noticed something he had not observed earlier: the thickened texture of the skin of Kurtz' back, as if dark little plaques were sprouting on both sides of his spine. No doubt there were many other changes as well, apparent only on a close inspection. Kurtz' eyes opened once again, and the black glossy orbs moved, as if seeking to meet Gundersen's eyes. He stared down at them, at the pattern of blue speckles against the shining solid background.

Kurtz said, amidst many sounds

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Gundersen could not comprehend, "Dance . . . live . . . seek . . . die . . . die."

It was time to leave.

WALKING past the motionless, rigid Seena, Gundersen left the room. He stepped onto the veranda and saw that his five nildoror were gathered outside the station, in the garden. Gundersen called out and Srin'gahar looked up.

"I'm ready," Gundersen said. "We can leave as soon as I have my things."

He found his clothes and prepared to depart. Seena came to him again. She was dressed in a clinging black robe, her slider wound around her left arm. Her face was bleak.

He asked, "Do you have any messages for Ced Cullen, if I find him?"

"I have no messages for anyone."

"All right. Thanks for the hospitality, Seena. It was good to see you again."

"The next time I see you," she said, "you won't know who I am. Or who you are."

"Perhaps."

He left her and went to the nildoror. Srin'gahar silently accepted the burden of him. Seena stood on the veranda of the station, watching the departure. In a little while he could no longer see her. The procession moved out along the bank of the river, past the place where Kurtz had danced all night with the nildoror so many years ago.

Kurtz. Closing his eyes, Gundersen imagined the glassy blind stare, the lofty forehead, the flattened face, the wasted flesh, the twisted legs, the deformed feet. Against that he placed his memories of the old Kurtz, that graceful and extraordinary-looking man, so tall and slender, so self-contained. What demons had driven Kurtz, in the end, to surrender his body and his soul to the priests of rebirth? How long had the reshaping of Kurtz taken? Had he felt any pain during the process? And how much awareness did he now have of his own condition? What had Kurtz said? I am Kurtz who toyed with your souls and now I offer you my own? Gundersen had never heard Kurtz speak in any tone but that of sardonic detachment—how could Kurtz have displayed real emotion, fear, remorse, guilt? *I am Kurtz the sinner, take me and deal with me as you wish. I am Kurtz the fallen. I am Kurtz the damned. I am Kurtz and I am yours. . .* Gundersen imagined Kurtz lying in some misty northern valley, his bones softened by the elixirs of the sulidoror, his body dissolving, becoming a pink jellied lump which now was free to seek a new form, to strive toward an altered Kurtzness that would be cleansed of its old satanic impurities. Was it presumptuous of Gundersen to place himself in the same class as Kurtz, to claim the same spiritual shortcomings, to go forward to meet that same terrible destiny? Was Seena not right, that this was a game, that he was merely playing at masochistic self-dramatization, electing himself the hero of a tragic myth, burdened by the ob-

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session to undertake an alien pilgrimage? But the compulsion seemed real enough to him and not at all a pretense.

I will go. I am not Kurtz but I will go because I must go.

In the distance, receding but yet powerful, the roar and throb of the waterfall still sounded. And as the rushing water hurtled down the face of the cliff it seemed to drum forth the words of Kurtz, the warning, the blessing, the threat, the prophecy, the curse: *water sleep death save sleep sleep fire love water dream cold sleep plan rise fall rise fall rise rise rise.*

Fall.

XII

FOR administrative purposes the Earthmen, during their years of occupation of Holman's World, had marked off boundaries arbitrarily here and here and here, choosing this parallel of latitude, that meridian of longitude, to encompass a district or sector. Since Belzagor itself knew nothing of parallels of latitude nor of other human measures and boundaries, those demarcations by now existed only in the archives of the Company and in the memories of the dwindling human population of the planet. But one boundary was far from arbitrary and its power still held—the natural line dividing the tropics from the mist country. On one side of that line lay the tropical highlands, sunbathed, fertile, forming the upper limit of the central band of lush vegetation that stretched down to the Torrid equatorial jungle. On the other side of that line, only a few kilometers away, the north came rolling in, creating the white world of the mists. The transition was sharp and, for a newcomer, even terrifying. One could explain it prosaically enough in terms of Belzagor's axial tilt and the effect that had on the melting of polar snows. One could speak learnedly of the huge icecaps in which so much moisture was locked, icecaps that extended so far into the temperate zones of the planet that the warmth of the tropics was able to nibble at them, liberating great masses of water vapor that swirled upward, curved poleward, and returned to the icecaps as regenerating snow. One could talk of the clash of climates and of the resulting marginal zones that were neither hot nor cold and were forever shrouded in the dense clouds born of that clash. But even these explanations did not prepare one for the initial shock of crossing the divide. One had a few hints: stray tufts of fog that drifted across the boundary and blotted out broad patches of the tropical highlands until the midday sun burned them away. Yet the actual change, when it came, was so profound, so absolute, that it stunned the spirit.

Gundersen and his nildoror companions were still some kilometers short of that point of change when a party of sulidoror came out of the bush and stopped them. Border guards.

Gundersen took no part in the discussion. The nildoror and the sulidoror drew to one side, leaving

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him alone to contemplate the lofty banks of white mist on the northern horizon. There seemed to be trouble. One tall, sleek young sulidor pointed several times at Gundersen and spoke at length. Srin'gahar replied in a few syllables and the sulidor appeared to grow angry, striding back and forth and vehemently knocking bark from trees with swipes of his huge claws. Srin'gahar spoke again and then some agreement was reached. The angry sulidor stalked off into the forest and Srin'gahar beckoned to Gundersen to remount. Guided by the two sulidor who remained, they resumed the northward march.

"What was the argument about?" Gundersen asked.

"Nothing."

"But he seemed very angry."

"It did not matter," said Srin'gahar.

"Was he trying to keep me from crossing the boundary?"

"He felt you should not go across," Srin'gahar admitted.

"Why? I have a many-born's permission."

"This was a personal grudge, friend of my journey. The sulidor claimed that you had offended him in time past. He knew you from the old days."

"That's impossible," Gundersen said. "I had hardly any contact at all with sulidoror back then. They never came out of the mist country and I scarcely ever went into it. I doubt that I spoke a dozen words to sulidoror in eight years on this world."

"The sulidor was not wrong in remembering that he had had contact with you," said Srin'gahar gently. "I must tell you that there are reliable witnesses to the event."

"When? Where?"

"It was a long time ago," Srin'gahar said. The nildor appeared content with that vague answer and offered no other details. After a few moments of silence he added: "The sulidor had good reason to be unhappy with you, I think. But we told him that you meant to atone for all of your past deeds and in the end he yielded. The sulidoror often are a stubborn and vindictive race."

"What did I do to him?"

"We do not need to talk of such things," replied Srin'gahar.

THE nildor retreated into silence. Gundersen had ample time to ponder the grammatical ambiguities of that last sentence. On the basis of its verbal content alone, it might have meant, *It is useless to talk of such things,* or, *It is harmful to talk of such things,* or, *It would be embarrassing to you to talk of such things,* or, *It would be embarrassing to me to talk of such things,* or, *It is improper to talk of such things,* or, *It is tasteless to talk of such things.* Only with the aid of the supplementary gestures, the movements of the crest-spines, the trunk, the ears, could the precise meaning be fathomed and Gundersen had neither the skill nor the right position for detecting those gestures. He was puzzled. He had no recollection of ever having given offense to a sulidor.

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After a while he concluded that Srin'gahar was deliberately being cryptic and might be speaking in parables too subtle or too alien for an Earthman's mind to catch. In any case the sulidor had withdrawn his mysterious objections to Gundersen's journey and the mist country was only a short distance away. Already the foliage of the jungle trees was more sparse than it had been a kilometer or two back and the trees themselves were smaller and more widely spaced. Pockets of heavy fog now were more frequent. In many places the sandy yellow soil was wholly exposed. Yet the air was warm and clear and the underbrush profuse and the bright golden sun was reassuringly visible—this was still unmistakably a place of benign and even commonplace climate.

Abruptly Gundersen felt a cold wind out of the north signaling change. The path wound down a slight incline, and when it rose on the far side he looked over a hummock into a broad field of complete desolation, a no-thing's-land between the jungle and the mist country. No tree, no shrub, no moss grew here. There was only the yellow soil, covered with a sprinkling of pebbles. Beyond this sterile zone Gundersen was confronted by a white palisade, glittering fiercely with reflected sunlight. Seemingly it was a cliff of ice hundreds of meters high that barred the way as far as he could see. In the extreme distance, behind and above this white wall, soared the tip of a mountain, pale red in color, whose rugged spires and peaks and parapets stood forth sharply and strangely against an iron-gray sky. Everything appeared larger than life, massive, monstrous, excessive.

"Here you must walk by yourself," said Srin'gahar. "I regret this but it is the custom. I can carry you no farther."

Gundersen promptly clambered down.

Unexpectedly he found himself panting after no more than fifty meters of walking beside the five nildoror. Their pace was slow and stately but the air here was evidently thinner than he knew. He forced himself to hide his distress. He would go on. He felt lightheaded, oddly buoyant, and he would master the pounding in his chest and the throbbing in his temples. The new chill in the air was invigorating in its austerity. They were halfway across the zone of emptiness and Gundersen now could clearly tell that what had appeared to be a solid white barrier stretching across the world was in fact a dense wall of mist at ground level. Outlying strands of that mist kissed his face. At its clammy touch images of death stirred in his mind—skulls and tombs and coffins and veils—but they did not dismay him. He looked toward the rose-red mountain dominating the land far to the north. As he did so the clouds that lay over the mist country parted, permitting the sun to strike the mountain's highest peak, a snowy dome of great expanse, and it seemed to him then that the face of Kurtz, transfigured, serene, looked down at him out of that

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smooth rounded peak. For a moment there was silence.

From the whiteness ahead emerged the figure of a giant old sulidor—Na-sinisul, keeping the promise he had made to be their guide. The sulidoror who had accompanied them this far exchanged a few words with Na-sinisul and trudged off back toward the jungle belt. Na-sinisul gestured. Walking alongside Srin'gahar, Gundersen went forward.

In a few minutes the procession entered the mist.

He did not find the mist so solid once he was within it. Much of the time he could see for twenty or thirty or even fifty meters in any direction. There were occasional inexplicable vortices of fog that were much thicker in texture and in which he could barely make out the green of Srin'gahar beside him—but these were few and quickly traversed. The sky was gray and sunless. At moments the solar ball could be discerned as a vague glow behind the clouds. The landscape was one of raw rock, bare soil and low trees—practically a tundra, although the air was merely chilly and not really cold. Many of the trees were of species also found in the south, but here they were dwarfed and distorted, sometimes not having the form of trees at all, but running along the ground like woody vines. Those trees that stood upright were no taller than Gundersen and gray moss draped every branch. Beads of moisture dotted their leaves, their stems, the outcroppings of rock and all else.

No one spoke. They marched for perhaps an hour, until Gundersen's back was bowed and his feet were numb. The ground sloped imperceptibly upward. The air seemed to grow steadily thinner. The temperature dropped quite sharply as the day neared its end. The dreary envelope of lowlying fog, endless and all-engulfing, exacted a toll on Gundersen's spirit. When he had seen that band of mist from outside, glittering brilliantly in the sunlight, it had stirred and excited him but now that he was inside it he felt small cheer. All color and warmth had drained from the universe. He could not even see the glorious rose-red mountain from here.

Like a mechanical man he went onward, sometimes forcing himself into a trot to keep up with the others. Na-sinisul set a formidable pace, which the nildoror had no difficulty in meeting but Gundersen was pushed to his limits. He was shamed by the loudness of his gasps and grunts, though no one else took notice of them. His breath hung before his face, fog within fog. He wanted desperately to rest. He could not bring himself to ask the others to halt and wait for him, though. This was their pilgrimage. He was the self-invited guest.

A DISMAL dusk began to descend. The grayness grew more gray and the faint hint of sunlight that had been evident now diminished. Visibility lessened immensely. The air became quite cold. Gundersen, dressed for

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jungle country, shivered at times.

He realized he was alone.

The nildoror were nowhere to be seen. Neither was Na-sinisul. Mist engulfed everything. Stunned, Gundersen rolled back the screen of his memory and saw that he must have been separated from his companions for several minutes, without regarding it as in any way remarkable. By now they might be far ahead of him on some other road.

He did not call out.

He yielded first to the irresistible and dropped to his knees to rest. Squatting, he pressed his hands to his face, then put his knuckles to the cold ground and let his head loll forward while he sucked in air. It would have been easy to sprawl forward altogether and lose consciousness. They might find him sleeping in the morning. Or frozen in the morning. He struggled to rise and succeeded on the third attempt.

"Srin'gahar?" he said.

Dizzy with exhaustion, he rushed forward, stumbling, sliding, colliding with trees, catching his feet in the undergrowth. He saw what was surely a nildor to his left and ran toward it, but when he clutched its flank he found it wet and icy, and he realized that he was grasping a boulder. He flung himself away from it. Just beyond, a file of massive shapes presented themselves—the nildoror marching past him? "Wait?" he called and ran—and felt the shock at his ankles as he plunged blindly into a shallow, frigid rivulet. He fell, landing on hands and knees in the water. Grimly he crawled to the far bank and lay there, recognizing the dark blurred shapes now as those of low, broad trees whipped by a rising wind.

All right, I'm lost. I'll wait right here until morning. . .

He huddled into himself, trying to wring the cold water from his clothes.

The night came, blackness in place of grayness. He sought moons overhead and found none. A terrible thirst consumed him. He tried to creep back to the brook but he could not even find that. His fingers were numb. His lips were cracking. But he discovered an island of calm within his discomfort and fear and clung to it, telling himself that none of what was happening was truly perilous and that all of it was somehow necessary.

Unknown hours later, Srin'gahar and Na-sinisul came to him. First Gundersen felt the soft probing touch of Srin'gahar's trunk against his cheek. He recoiled and flattened himself on the ground, relaxing slowly as he realized what it was that had brushed his skin.

Far above, the nildor said, "Here he is."

"Alive?" Na-sinisul asked, dark voice coming from worlds away, swaddled in layers of fog.

"Alive. Wet and cold. Edmundgundersen, can you stand up?"

"Yes. I'm all right, I think." Shame flooded his spirit. "Have you been looking for me all this time?"

"No," said Na-sinisul blandly. "We continued on to the village.

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There we discussed your absence. We could not be sure if you were lost or had separated yourself from us with a purpose. And then Srin'gahar and I returned. Did you intend to leave us?"

"I got lost," Gundersen said miserably.,

Even now he was not permitted to ride the nildor. He staggered along between Srin'gahar and Na-sinisul, now and then clutching the sulidor's thick fur or grasping the nildor's smooth haunch, steadying himself whenever he felt his strength leaving him or whenever the unseen footing grew difficult. In time lights glimmered in the dark, a pale lanternglow coming milkily through the fogbound blackness. Dimly Gundersen saw the shabby huts of a sulidor village. Without waiting for an invitation he lurched into the nearest of the ramshackle log structures: It was steepwalled, musty-smelling, with strings of dried flowers and the bunched skins of animals suspended from the rafters. Several seated sulidoror looked at him with no show of interest. Gundersen warmed himself and dried his clothing. Someone brought him a bowl of sweet, thick broth and a little while afterward he was offered some strips of dried meat, which were difficult to bite and chew but extraordinarily well flavored. Dozens of sulidoror came and went. Once, when the flap of hide covering the door was left open, he caught sight of his nildoror sitting just outside the hut. A tiny fierce-faced animal, fog-white and wizened, skittered up to him and inspected him with disdain—some northern beast, he supposed, that the sulidoror favored as pets. The creature plucked at Gundersen's still soggy clothing and made a cackling sound. Its tufted ears twitched. Its sharp little fingers probed his sleeve. Its long, prehensile tail curled and uncurled. Then it leaped into Gundersen's lap, seized his arm with quick claws and nipped his flesh. The bite was no more painful than the pricking of a mosquito but Gundersen wondered what hideous alien infection he would now contract. He made no move to push the little animal away, however. Suddenly a great sulidoror paw descended, claws retracted, and knocked the beast across the room. The massive form of Na-sinisul lowered itself into a crouch next to Gundersen. The ejected animal chattered its rage from a far corner.

Na-sinisul said, "Did the munzor bite you?"

"Not deeply. Is it dangerous?"

"No harm will come to you," said the sulidor. "We will punish the animal."

"I hope you won't. It was only playing."

"It must learn that guests are sacred," said Na-sinisul firmly. He leaned close. Gundersen was aware of the sulidor's fishy breath. Huge fangs gaped in the deep-muzzled mouth. Quietly Na-sinisul said, "This village will house you until you are ready to go on. I must leave with the nildoror and continue to the mountain of rebirth."

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"Is .that the big red mountain north of here?"

"Yes. Their time is very close and so is mine. I will see them through their rebirths and then my turn will come."

"Sulidoror undergo rebirth too, then?"

Na-sinsul seemed surprised. "How else could it be?"

"I don't know. I know so little about all of this."

"If sulidoror were not reborn," said Na-sinisul, "then nildoror could not be reborn. One is inseparable from the other."

"In what way?"

"If there were no day, could there be night?"

THE analogy was too cryptic. Gundersen attempted to press for an explanation but Na-sinisul had come to speak of other matters. Avoiding the Earthman's questions, the sulidor said, "They tell me that you have come to our country to speak with a man of your own people, the man Cullen. Is this so?"

"It is. It's one of the reasons I'm here, anyway."

"The man Cullen lives three villages north of here and one village to the west. He has been informed that you have arrived and he summons you. Sulidoror of this village will conduct you to him when you wish to leave."

"I'll leave in the morning," Gundersen said.

"I must declare one thing to you, first. The man Cullen has taken refuge among us and so he is sacred. There can be no hope of removing him from our country and delivering him to the nildoror."

"I ask only to speak with him."

"That may be done. But your treaty with the nildoror is known to us. You must remember that you can fulfill that treaty only by a breach of our hospitality."

Gundersen made no reply. He did not see how he could promise anything of this nature to Na-sinisul without at the same time forswearing his promise to the many-born Vol'himyor. So he clung to his original inner treaty—he would speak with Cedric Cullen, and then he would decide how to act. But it disturbed him that the sulidoror were already aware of his true purpose in seeking Cullen.

Na-sinisul left him. Gundersen attempted to sleep and for a while he achieved an uneasy doze. But the lamps flickered all night in the sulidor hut and lofty sulidoror strode back and forth noisily around and about him. And the nildoror just outside the building engaged in a long debate of which Gundersen could catch only a few meaningless syllables. Once Gundersen awoke to find the little long-eared munzor sitting on his chest and cackling. Later in the night three sulidoror hacked up a bloody carcass just next to the place where Gundersen huddled. The sounds of the rending of flesh awakened him briefly but he slipped back into his troubled sleep—only to wake again when a savage quarrel erupted over the division of the meat. When the bleak dawn came, Gundersen felt more tired

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than if he had not slept at all.

He was given breakfast. Two young sulidoror, Se-holomir and Yi-gartigok, announced that they had been chosen to escort him to the village where Cullen was staying. Na-sinisul and the five nildoror prepared to leave for the mountain of rebirth. Gundersen made his farewells to his traveling companions.

"I wish you joy of your rebirth," he said and watched as the huge shapes moved off into the mist.

Not long afterward he resumed his own journey. His new guides were taciturn and aloof—just as well, for he wanted no conversation as he struggled through this hostile country. He needed to think. He was not sure at all what he would do after he had seen Cullen. His original plan of undergoing rebirth, which had seemed so noble in the abstract, now struck him as the highest folly—not only because of what Kurtz had become but because he saw it as a trespass, an unspontaneous and self-conscious venture into the rites of an alien species. Go to the rebirth mountain, yes. Satisfy your curiosity. But submit to rebirth? For the first time he was genuinely unsure of whether he would—and more than half suspicious that in the end he would draw back, unreborn.

The tundra of the border zone was giving way to forest country. The phenomenon seemed a curious inversion to him: trees were growing larger here in higher latitudes. But these were different trees. The dwarfed and twisted shrubs to his rear were natives of the jungle, making an unhappy adaptation to the mist. Here, deeper in the mist country, true northern trees grew. They were thick boled and lofty, with dark corrugated bark and tiny sprays of needlelike leaves. Fog shrouded their upper branches. Through this cold and misty forest, too, ran lean, straggly animals, long-nosed and bony, which erupted from holes in the ground and sped up the sides of trees, evidently in quest of bough-dwelling rodents and birds. Broad patches of ground were covered with snow, although summer was supposedly approaching in this hemisphere. On the second night northward came a hailstorm when a dense and tossing cloud of ice rode toward them on a thin whining wind. Mute and glum, Gundersen's companions marched on through it and so did he, not enjoying it.

Generally now the mist was light at ground level and often he saw none at all for an hour or more. But it congealed far overhead as an unbroken veil, hiding the sky. Gundersen became accustomed to the barren soil, the angular branches of bare trees, the chilly penetrating dampness that was so different from the jungle's humidity. He came to find beauty in the starkness. When fleecy coils of mist drifted like ghosts across a wide gray stream, when furry beasts sprinted over glazed fields of ice, when some hoarse ragged cry broke the incredible stillness, when the marchers turned an angle in the path and came upon a

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white tableau of harsh wintry emptiness, Gundersen responded with a strange kind of delight. In the mist country, he thought, the hour is always the hour just after dawn, when everything is clean and new.

On the fourth day Se-holomir said, "The village you seek lies behind the next hill."

TO BE CONCLUDED

GALAXY STARS

We met Gerald Jonas two-and-a half years ago, when he came to the New York World Science Fiction Convention to interview *GALAXY* writers for the *New Yorker* magazine. Now *GALAXY* turns the tables and interviews Mr. Jonas.

He began reading sf at about age thirteen. "I was madly in love with *Astounding*," he says, "and was sure I didn't have room in my heart for two magazines, that is until *GALAXY* appeared and divided my loyalties."

After four years at Yale, a year at Cambridge, much reading of Shakespeare and Joyce, and six months in the army, Jonas landed a berth as reporter on the *Boston Herald*. Later he returned to his native New York City and soon was collecting the material for *Newsbreaks*, the *New Yorker's* column fillers recounting humorous errors found in signs and publications. He still recalls with glee the restaurant that offered "Leg of Salmon" and the account of the "tracks that were made by a big hopping rabbi and not the Jersey devil." Jonas soon moved up to contributing to the popular *Talk of the Town* feature and then to writing by-lined fact articles, the most recent being on the American Friends Service Committe (Quakers).

Jonas' inspiration for "The Shaker Revival" came when he had a summer home in Hancock, Mass., near a Shaker village—a restored community that is run as a museum.

Jonas' wife Susan, a researcher for *Time-Life Books*, is also an sf reader. They have a fourteen-month-old daughter, Sarah, who already shows signs of becoming a buff.

GERALD JONAS INTERVIEWING HARLAN ELLISON AT THE NYCON

Photo by J.K. Klein

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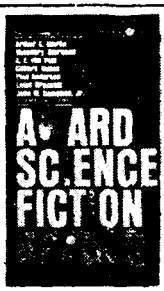

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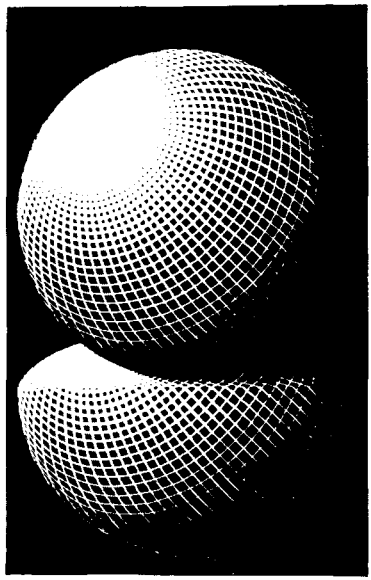

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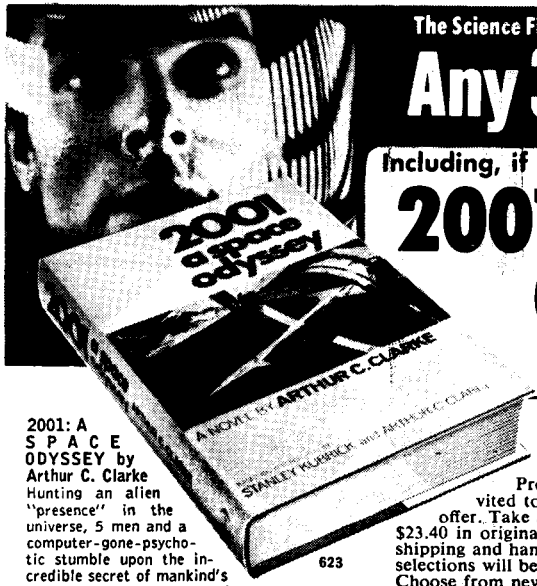

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